DRUID MAGAZINE

On Being an American Druid

WINTER/ SPRING 2017

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Druid Magazine

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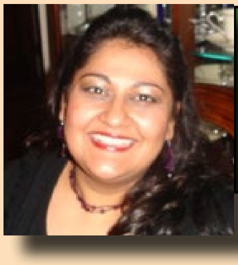
Disclaimer

Information contained in this magazine is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any chronic disease or emergency condition. Content, incuding recipes and remedies, is not intended as a substitute for advice from your physician or other health care professional. Before consuming herbs, supplements, and/ or remedies and testing recipes, please consult with your physician or healthcare professional, and carefully read all information provided by the author or manufacturer, including the label of any homeopathic remedy.



From the Editor's Desk…

Renu K. Aldrich

Welcome to Druid Magazine!

Dear readers,

Happy Alban Eilir! We are back from sabbatical! And what a changed world we find ourselves in since our last issue. The editorial team did not know just how fitting this issue's theme of mental health would be. It is a time of turmoil in the United States, and many people are experiencing a multitude of negative feelings. Just watching the news or your Facebook feed can feel overwhelming right now. We at Druid Magazine hope that we may bring you ideas for staying peaceful while supporting efforts to better our world.

To this end, I will be the special guest presenter at Mid-Atlantic Gathering of the United States (MAGUS), the new OBOD camp that kicks off this May, offering a workshop on how to kindle your spiritual warrior. Advocacy can take many forms, and what we do should align with our personal goals and mission in life. I hope you will join us for the weekend, which will be focused on how to maintain our Druid values while dealing with turbulent change. Conscious acceptance of what role we are able to play is essential to maintaining good mental health. Jason Stieber provides with the details on MAGUS in Across the Americas, and Loam Ananda gives us a newcomer's perspective on ECG.

Mental health and Druidry have vast connections, and I explore a few aspects here. But what about when you or a grove mate have a diagnosed psychiatric condition? Or if a seed group member begins acting in a way that concerns you? We also provide some tips for managing these kinds of questions. In addition, Gail Nyoka discusses another connection between some mental health practices and the redemptive and reparative aspects of storytelling. faucon of Sakin'el explores a Bardic approach to mental balance and also graces us with a special story about coping in *Cycling*. Shelley Keneipp provides information on restorative *Forest Bathing* techniques in Healthy Ways while Barb Pott delivers a personal look at how to handle emotional challenges such as being laid off from work.

Sarah Fuhro takes us on a journey of instruction for alchemical transformation illustrated in part by photographer Bruce Lhuillier, who brings his artistry to the magazine beginning with this issue. We are also pleased to welcome two new columnists. Lolly Nicol brings her wit and charm to help us all live more consciously, making better choices for our bodies and the environment. Kirstie Maylor provides us with her mouthwatering recipes in Hearth & Cauldron, kicking off with a delicious onion pie dating back to the 14th century that I had the honor of devouring while celebrating Yule with the Keepers of Dragon

Knowledge Grove in Ann Arbor, MI this past December.

Also in the issue, we have an excerpt of Ron Hutton's interview from Ellen Evert Hopman's book on her conversations with Druid leaders from around the Western world. David North provides part one of his intimate interview with Damh the Bard on his roles as pendragon, bard, and musician. The interview is available in audio format, but we also provide a transcript. Dave continues his wonderful series on performing public ritual in Ritual Space, co-authoring an article with his wife Nicole Sussurro on how we use the motion of our bodies. MAGUS co-organizer Nicole profiles artist Sophia Kelly Shultz, whose amazing photography—including of Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary, continues to enliven our pages.

Selene Blackwell has our rapt attention with her scientific exploration of meeting others on the astral plane in Practical Druidry. In Magical Crafting, Richard "Skyllaros" Derks shows us how to create geomantic dice while we also depict the sacred geometry adventures I had with an amazing group of Druid women over the new year's holiday. Sarah Disler reviews a classic Hopman book, *A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year*.

Voices of Awen features poetic gifts by Dean Easton on *Drinking with the Ancestors*, Buck Marchinton on *The King in Exile*, and Rosaria Marie on *Bodhran*. We get a lovely taste of Nyoka's new book for young adults, *Star's Reflection*. M.F. Harding delivers another delightful tale in *Chester and the Hummingbird Fair*, and faucon provides a children's chant and tale on *Birth Circle, a song of the Gusari*. Ahote Baggins rounds out the issue with his creative exploration of being an American Druid.

We hope this magazine brings you closer to your Druid family and lifestyle. May we continue to support and love one another whether in the darkness of winter or while enjoying the dawning of new life in spring.

Brightest blessings,

Renu /|\

PRACTICUM

One-minute refresher: Take a deep breath either in through your nose if you need to be more calm or in through your mouth if you need more energy. Slowly inhale until your abdomen rises. Hold your breath for three seconds before exhaling. Do so as audibly as you can. If it feels right, imagine stress, exhaustion—and anything else you wish to release—leaving your body on the out-breaths. Shake a little to remove staleness and let the fresh energy seep inside.

Renu K. Aldrich, M.A., LMFT, aka the Hindu Druid, has been a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since 1997. She is a doctoral student at Virginia Tech, where she specializes in working with developmental trauma survivors and studies how to incorporate Eastern healing techniques into Western psychotherapy. Initially a journalist, Renu also has served as a communications executive in the publishing world, in academia, and on Wall Street. She launched Druid Magazine in 2015 in service to the spiritual community.

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News Features

DRUIDRY & MENTAL HEALTH: PARALLEL PATHWAYS

BY RENU K. ALDRICH

Druidry has resonated with me deeply as I seek a spiritual life that complements my journey of personal growth. My connection to the experiential, nature-based spirituality was fueled in large part by my trauma recovery; I explored knowledge and activities to heal my mind, body, and spirit. I also wanted to be among like-minded people with similar values celebrating equality, upholding inclusion, and honoring the earth. Druidry is an accepting spirituality with a typically compassionate and openminded community. People at our gatherings often describe finding a true and loving family for the first time. But some marginalized people, including those with mental health conditions, face barriers to establishing a home under the oaks.

Personal Synchronicity

During the time I worked through the mysteries of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids' (OBOD) Ovate grade, I also earned my clinical master's degree and became a licensed marriage and family therapist (MFT). By combining mental health and my personal spirituality, I tapped into strengths and abilities to use my pain as seeds of transformation. Both forged me into a healer simultaneously, working on multiple levels to guide and nurture me. Plus, Druidry's lessons kept my passion for psychotherapy as sacred work kindled.

Now, the Druid grade is a fitting companion as I finish doctoral work in human development. Adding research and teaching to my professional life has expanded the ways in which I am able to effect positive change in the world. Druidry has kept my focus on why I went into mental health in the first place; my dissertation study is on how communal activities, like ritual, can benefit spiritual minorities in healing from trauma.

The gwers also helps keep me grounded in my own personal development because the lessons for the OBOD correspondence course often contain therapeutic interventions. That should come as no surprise given that Chosen Chief Philip Carr-Gomm, who was primarily responsible for rewriting the lessons, is a psychologist. His work has combined both mysticism and psychology, viewing both as crucial lenses for understanding—and transforming—the

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human experience (Carr-Gomm, 2017).

Transpersonal Connections

Druidry and mental health seem wedded to each other, from the conceptual to the actual work. In fact, numerous Mount Haemus scholars have written on psychological topics. My own worldview aligns with transpersonal humanistic psychology because of how it embraces my Druid values. It is a framework that integrates the Western mindset with spiritual development and self-actualization from indigenous traditions, including Vedic Hindu and Druid philosophies. According to this theory, change involves self-actualization, high moral functioning, and discovery of the self's true spiritual nature (Guest, 1989). Mystical experiences and transcending the warring dualities in life, such as by harmonizing inner masculine and feminine aspects, are avenues to reach these goals. The theory engenders healing techniques that are a combination of talk therapy with participatory spiritual practice to cultivate the embodied, relational, and experiential dimensions of spiritual co-creation.

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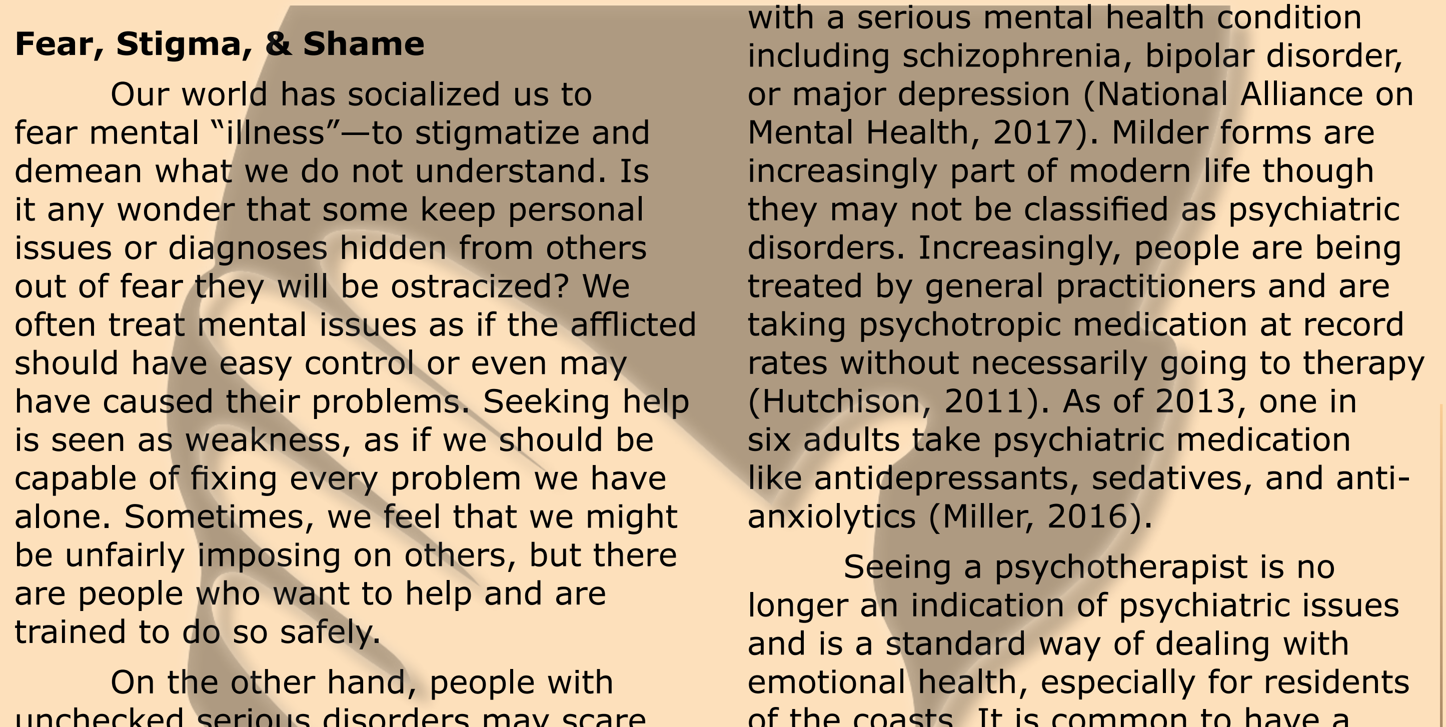
Transpersonal theory supports the empirical study of ancient healing strategies such as mindfulness and ritual (Guest, 1989). But unlike the traditional Western approaches to scholarly studies, transpersonal psychology does not overly privilege the "experts." It holds the principle of equipotentiality—that all beings are both students and teachers (Ferrer, 2011). Knowledge should be shared by researchers and participants with little or no hierarchy. Under the transpersonal view, research—whether through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods— is a "journey of transformation" and a "sacred encounter" (Anderson, 2015, p. 164) that invites the researcher to change and become more aware through the experience of examining sacred phenomenon. In this mindset, peak experiences and spiritual phenomenon that cannot be fully explained are not pathologized but captured as authentic and valid experiences to be studied.

Unfortunately, spirituality is not a typical component of psychotherapy because many clinicians lack interest or training, have discomfort with existential issues, or are unwilling to seem like they are imposing their views on clients (Post & Wade, 2009). But Druids can now seek clergy to obtain some forms of therapeutic help, such as from those who are trained to offer other services including rites of passage like funerals and weddings. OBOD offers celebrancy training teaching the idea that ritualists will go on healing journeys themselves as they facilitate for others. This is a humanistic concept, that the psychotherapist must also be transformed if the client is to change. Another connection is apparent through the online celebrancy course, which helps participants reflect on "the skills and qualities needed to work with families at times of loss and trauma…and to help lay the foundations for a healthy grieving and healing process" (OBOD, 2017, para. 2).

Despite these braided ties to mental health, Druidry is not always a welcoming environment for people with psycholgical issues, especially those who attend groups and gatherings alone without support or established relationships. While neither OBOD's course nor all therapy techniques can be applied to everyone, psychiatric issues raise particular concerns for all sides in the Druid community.



Fear, Stigma, & Shame

Our world has socialized us to fear mental "illness"—to stigmatize and demean what we do not understand. Is it any wonder that some keep personal issues or diagnoses hidden from others out of fear they will be ostracized? We often treat mental issues as if the afflicted should have easy control or even may have caused their problems. Seeking help is seen as weakness, as if we should be capable of fixing every problem we have alone. Sometimes, we feel that we might be unfairly imposing on others, but there are people who want to help and are trained to do so safely.

On the other hand, people with unchecked serious disorders may scare others with their behavior and symptoms, which can include paranoia, mood swings, and decompensation of their ability to maintain daily life or cope with stress. In rare situations, they can be dangerous. But most of the time, they may make people uncomfortable even though they are trying to manage a difficult situation to the best of their abilities. They may be working on handling symptoms, have social anxiety, or simply lack the experience of being in social situations. Trauma survivors and those afflicted with any kind of childhood illness may not be skilled in social interactions, causing them to feel isolated and unsure of how to handle relationships, especially in group settings. Kindness and compassion go a long way to helping them feel part of the community.

Mental health is something we all experience; it is our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. If you have ever had anxiety or depression, then you have experienced a common mental health condition. One in five U.S. adults, about 44 million people or 18.5% of the population, have a mental health condition (Nguyen & Davis, 2017). In addition, one in 25 adults live with a serious mental health condition including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression (National Alliance on Mental Health, 2017). Milder forms are increasingly part of modern life though they may not be classified as psychiatric disorders. Increasingly, people are being treated by general practitioners and are taking psychotropic medication at record rates without necessarily going to therapy (Hutchison, 2011). As of 2013, one in six adults take psychiatric medication like antidepressants, sedatives, and anti-anxiolytics (Miller, 2016).

Seeing a psychotherapist is no longer an indication of psychiatric issues and is a standard way of dealing with emotional health, especially for residents of the coasts. It is common to have a therapist for many reasons from coping with stress at work to managing family and couple relationships. Most who need mental health services, however, do not utilize them due to lack of access, financial barriers, and stigma. Almost six in 10 U.S. adults with a mental health issue do not receive treatment despite the rising prevalence of these conditions and the fact that nearly 4% of the U.S. adult population report having serious thoughts

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of suicide (Nguyen & Davis, 2017).

Here, we can come full circle back to Druidry, which teaches us numerous ways of being more conscious and present for our experience of ourselves as well as the world around us. Therapy does not work for everyone, and some find self-help material to be invaluable. For some, Druidry courses like OBOD's may serve as a way of delving into issues that cross the constructed boundaries of psychology and spirituality.

Between Realities and the Spiritual

Aside from the intricacies of social interaction, mental health issues may be a barrier to experiencing aspects of Druidry. In fact, the Order's web site advises those with severe mental illness (*see sidebar*) that certain practices can be harmful. This is especially true of the activities in Druid courses like the OBOD gwers that ask us to tap into other dimensions and planes. Some mindfulness-based exercises like meditation, for example, seem simple, but their power can impact us to the core because they can alter consciousness. The OBOD disclaimer specifically mentions schizophrenia or psychosis, but it could be dangerous for anyone without a grasp on reality (Brown, 2017; Weinstein, 2015). For example, people who have depersonalization disorder are disconnected from themselves and reality. But others experience adverse reactions from meditation that vary in intensity, including anxiety and panic, confusion and disorientation, depression, anger, despair, and repressed memories of abuse (Perez-De-Albeniz & Holmes, 2000).

Academic research (for example, Klainin-Yobas, Cho, & Creedy, 2012; Spijkerman, Pots, & Bohlmeijer, 2016) shows that many mental health conditions can improve through mindfulness practices, especially with the aid of a therapist. While the OBOD mentor program is a valuable resource, it does not provide in-person guidance or counseling to maintain safety. Some of the activities in the gwers can be intense experiences for anyone. It may be helpful to process emotions and revelations with a trusted friend or therapist to maximize benefits and understanding. This is one of the reasons many of us participate in group activities with other Druids, finding connection and growth through sharing experiences and what we value.

Group Dynamics

Groups can be extraordinarily beneficial for support and spiritual activities. OBOD seed groups and groves are based on the idea that communal connection is a wonderful, yet optional, facet of Druidry. We develop special bonds with other members, often coming together in ritual, over food, and to work on projects. But so often after a harmonious period in a group, things become rocky.

Strong relationships make us feel safe enough for our psyches to work on healing past wounds. Unresolved grief, for example, can play havoc on our emotions and relationships, clashing with perhaps issues arising for another member. Without awareness or conscious behavior, this can result in unintended consequences. Clashes may lead to re-experiencing feelings or fears of betrayal, abandonment, lack of appreciation, and disrespect. Personal family dynamics, if unresolved or dysfunctional, in particular can serve to break down even the strongest group ties. Some groups are unprepared for when this occurs, while others develop rules designed to mitigate it. (*See sidebar on handling mental health issues in a seed group or grove.*)

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THE OBOD COURSE & MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

From the OBOD website:

Is the Course suitable for me if I have had mental health issues?

Many people go through difficult times in their life, and the course can be very helpful and supportive at such times. But you should not enroll [in] the course if you have ever been diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia or a psychotic condition. The reason for this is that while much of the course material can be instructive and helpful to anyone, the course does offer meditations, visualizations and rituals which are designed to 'open people up' to their unconscious states and potentially other levels of perception. For those who haven't suffered from such a condition this process can be helpful, but if you have, these exercises have the potential to be counter-productive. If the training was undertaken in a face-to-face situation the exercises could be paced and adjusted to suit the individual, but since the course is administered from a distance, such adjustment and monitoring just isn't possible.

Although the distance learning programme is not suitable if you have had these challenges, Druidry can still be followed as a spiritual way/philosophy/religion by making use of the many resources available on the web and in books. It is important to note that this policy refers only and specifically to a diagnosis of schizophrenia or a psychotic condition. We have found that members who have received other diagnoses can benefit from the course. If you are thinking of enrolling for the course but are not sure if it is for you, just email us at office@druidry.org.

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MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN A SEED GROUP OR GROVE

BY RENU K. ALDRICH

Religions and philosophies alternative to the mainstream, such as Druidry, can attract people who feel rejected and abandoned by society. This is something leaders of seed groups and groves know well—many have had experiences with members who leave them regretting opening their homes to strangers. But what if the group has a member or a potential member who has a mental health condition?

People with mental health issues should not be denied the wonderful opportunities on this path we share. But the reality is that sometimes leaders and group members feel ill-equipped to handle situations involving mental health conditions. Here are some questions and thoughts to consider:

- Does your group/ grove have a membership process or policy? Do you address acceptable behavior and what is considered inappropriate with members?

- If someone seems to be having a hard time and cannot focus, gently try to ask them questions about what is wrong. Perhaps they need to talk to a friend, relative, or therapist. Sometimes a relative can offer help and information.

- If the person does not get any better or gets worse, ask if they have any condition, including diabetes, that may be causing their symptoms. Ask if you should call a relative or ambulance.

- If they cannot respond, if they seem unaware of reality, or they become unduly agitated, call 911 for paramedics. Explain what you are witnessing so the experts can begin their assessment of the situation. It could be physiological, psychological, or a combination of issues.

- In some situations, a person may decompensate. This is the rapid escalation of an inability to cope and typically requires medical assistance. In extreme cases, people esp. with schizophrenia or paranoia may become violent. While this is rare, it is better to call for help for everyone's safety and consideration.

- Remember the principles of confidentiality. Everyone has the right to privacy and to share their personal information with whom they choose.

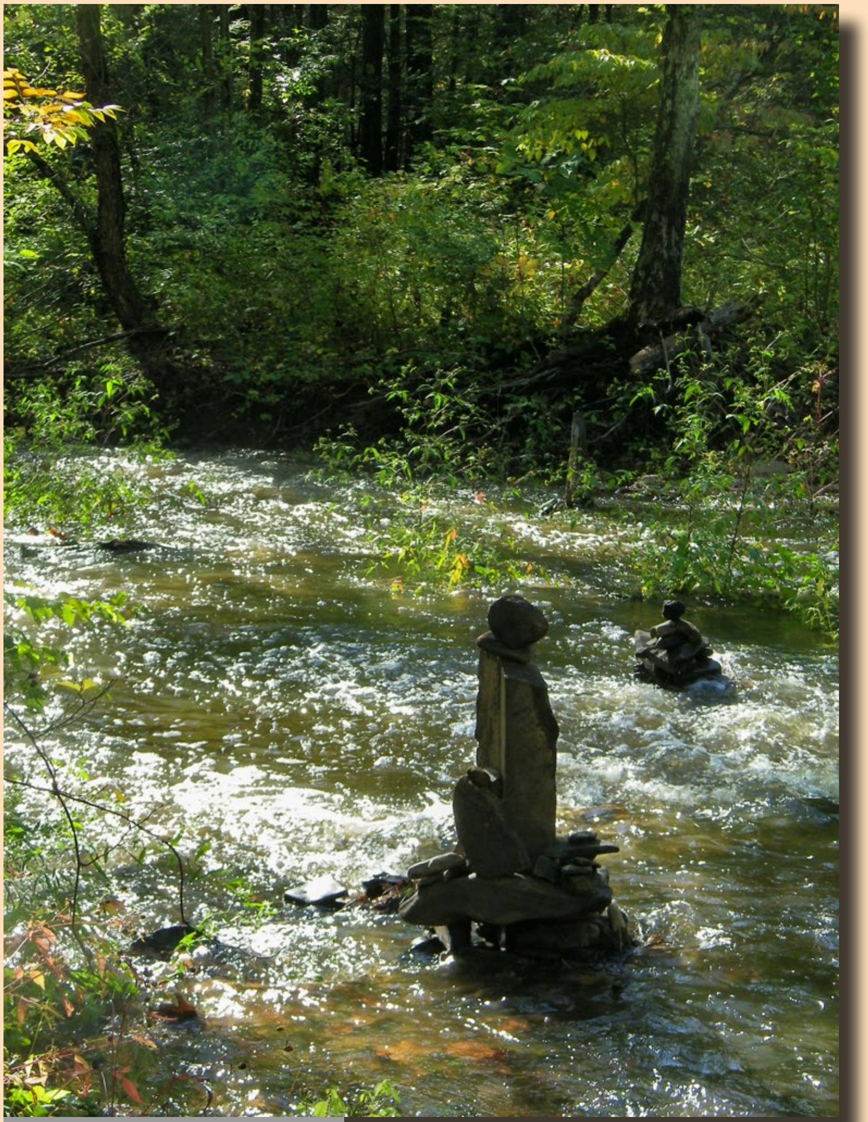
- The stigma of mental health and fear of rejection keeps many from having the experiences they deserve, and may inhibit them from joining groups or asking for help. If you have concerns about joining a group, how do you plan to handle them?

- If you have a mental health issue or diagnosis, consider what you need to feel safe participating. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides information on the benefits of spirituality and evaluating faith-based communities

Disclosing your condition is a very important personal decision that should not be made lightly. Would you feel comfortable having at least one person in the group as an ally? NAMI provides an excellent resource on the many issues involved and support

Leaders and hosts, do you have a list of mental health resources for your area for emergencies and referrals? For example, some local agencies (example) have emergency personnel who will come to your location to assess whether someone is suicidal, a danger to others, or needs intervention for other reasons. Similarly, crisis hotlines (example) can help you determine if it is an emergency.

Many action plans for managing mental health conditions include providing doctors with peer evaluations to better gauge the person's condition. A key element of healing and management is social support and spirituality. Does your group/ grove have an agreement on being part of such an action plan on behalf of a member?



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Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary, Artemas, PA

ALCHEMY AND THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

BY SARAH FUHRO

"Confront the dark parts of yourself, and work to banish them with illumination and forgiveness. Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing." August Wilson

© Bruce Lhuillier

Greek figure

Chemical Alchemy is not the subject of this article. It's a huge and interesting topic, but what I really want to talk about is personal Alchemy, deep change. When you are going through this process, it helps to have a blueprint of what's being created. As an astrologer, I often see clients when they are in the midst of this process of spiritual transformation.

Planets follow their cosmic courses and come into contact with the planets in our birth chart. Like strings on a musical instrument, we respond in ways unique to each of us. While the story is particular, the process is universal.

© Bruce Lhuillier

Egyptian bas relief

In our lives, there are periods of intense transformation. These terrible and fruitful times occur at every level of our existence. They often begin in pain, but if we follow them through, they bring great joy and deeper recognition of who we are.

Death and rebirth are partners in the process of deep change. The photo (*right*) is of a Teotihuacan funeral urn. The journey to the Otherworld is never without scary moments, demons, and chaos.

© Sarah Fuhro

Teotihuacan funeral urn

© Bruce Lhuillier

Egyptian mask

But destruction of the Soul is not possible. Alchemy shows us that there is a mixture of death and life as we learn as Ovates. ‘In the end is the beginning, in the beginning is the end.’ We embrace death to more fully understand life. Alchemy is one way to understand these periods of upheaval, and to embrace the universal nature of change.

Druidry and Shamanism follow many of the alchemical processes, but vary from Alchemy in one very important way! Instead of working in a dark laboratory, under a protective roof away from the seasons and elements, we take our transformational work into Nature. There we find the dark chamber within which is our cauldron. It is here that we are destroyed and nurtured!

© Sarah Fuhro

© Bruce Lhuillier

Here are the Seven Steps of the alchemical transformative process.

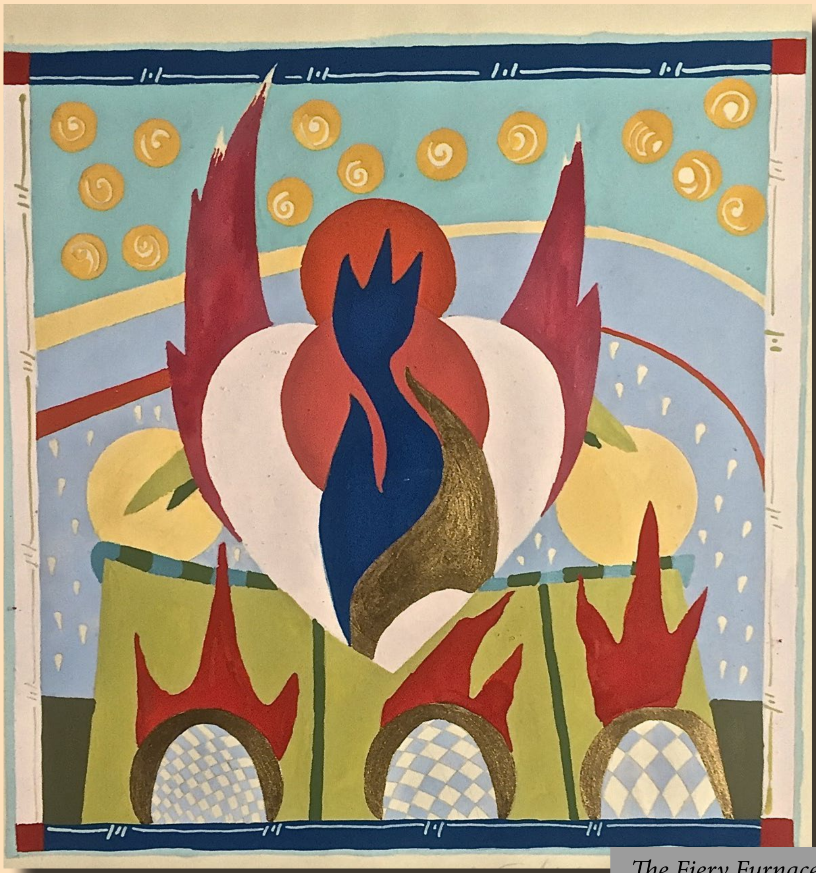
At various points in your life, you’ve been on this journey, or you are presently slogging your way through one of the steps.

1. **Calcination**
2. **Dissolution**
3. **Separation**
4. **Conjunction**
5. **Fermentation**
6. **Distillation**
7. **Coagulation**

Step 1: Calcination

Calcination is the process of destruction by Fire. Be assured that this powerful force will not occur unless you are grounded in the First Chakra at the base of the spine. Saturn is in charge of this part of the process and demands that you create structures, which will support your journey.

You may experience this in the form of loss or illness on the physical plane, or it may take place on the inner realm. Mental constructs, the ego, and dearly held beliefs perish. The sense of devastation is total. You become ash. The flames burn you to your bones; your ego and mental conversation are useless to save you. You are released.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The Fiery Furnace

Step 2: Dissolution

The ashes that once were you, now dissolve in Water. The conscious mind lets go, and the heart and unconscious are cleansed of buried emotions, which conceal or distort our true nature.

You become giddy with bliss. Creativity seems to flow from you. This takes place in the Second Chakra, in the organs that dissolve and filter what we take into our body. Jupiter rules this process, and we are part of a cosmic river!

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Step 3: Separation

At the point of Separation, we are ready to filter the remains of Dissolution. Only what is genuine remains in our ashes. We rediscover our essence, and we can trust our dreams and visions. All the 'gold' we rejected with the rational, masculine part of our minds is now open to the process of reintegration and refinement. What shamed us is no longer hidden.

We learn to follow and control the breath as it brings us in touch with Spirit, and we give birth to new energy and physical renewal. Separation takes place in the Solar Plexus Chakra. The energy comes from the life force of Mars. We are released from exile and isolation! We acknowledge our animal nature.

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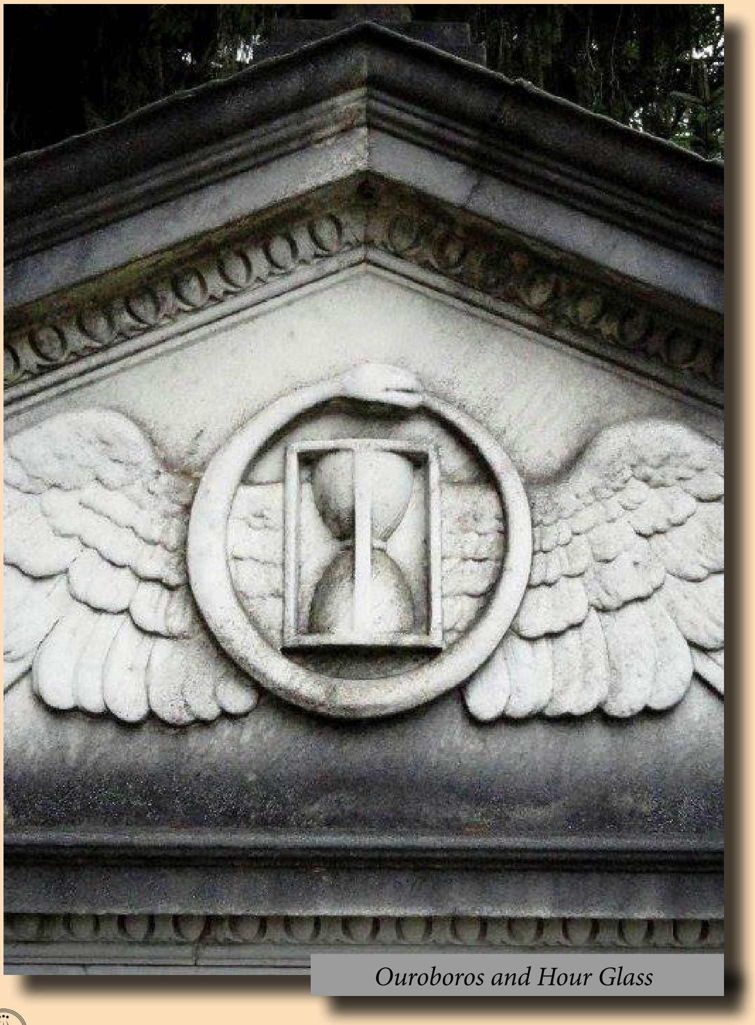
Step 4: Conjunction

Conjunction is an alchemical process, which combines what was retained from the work of Separation. The chemical alchemists said the residue formed resembles a child being born. It is the empowerment of our true selves, the union of masculine and feminine, and the sacred marriage. The conscious and the unconscious come together. This conjunction creates the Child of the Sacred Marriage. Alchemists call this the 'Lesser Stone.' Conjunction takes place in the Heart Chakra, and is ruled by Venus. At this stage synchronicities begin to occur, which tell us we are on the right track.

Step 5: Fermentation

In order for Fermentation to take place, we must completely accept ourselves. The Ouroboros, a snake or salamander who holds his tail in his mouth, completing a circle, is the symbol of this level of self-acceptance.

Fermentation on the physical level is the growth of bacteria; like those who change milk into cheese and grapes into wine. During Fermentation, alchemists used stinking chemicals to make a beautiful fragrance called 'the Balsam of the Soul.' The fermentation of our Spirit requires intense prayer, desire for mystical union, a vision quest. We are conscious of the grip of personal history, and leave it behind. Fermentation connects us to inspiration from a source beyond us. It takes place in the Throat Chakra. It is Mercury who becomes the messenger of the gods for us.



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Ouroboros and Hour Glass

Step 6: Distillation

Distillation is the process of boiling and condensation of the fermented solution to increase purity, as when wine is distilled to make brandy. For this reason, Dr. Edward Bach recommended brandy as a stabilizer in his flower essences. This is known as the 'White Stage' of Alchemy.

Distillation in the spiritual process of transformation requires agitation and sublimation of psychic forces. After learning to trust our visions, dreams, and intuitions in the earlier stages, we must now distill them to make sure they are free from sentimentality and emotion, free from our personal identity. Distillation is the purification of the unborn Self. Distillation brings the creative force out of us as we become more interested in the greater good. This process takes place in the third eye at the level of the pituitary and pineal glands and is ruled by the Sun and the Moon.

"Your thoughts and feeling are the feelings and thoughts of the whole universe." [As quoted in Newton (Newman, 2010)].

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Libation bowl

Step 7: Coagulation

The final step in the alchemical process is Coagulation. The image of Coagulation is an androgynous child emerging from an open grave. This is the second body of light. United with universal reality, there is a new confidence in us as we feel the light coursing through us. This is what is meant by the Philosopher's Stone.

This final step takes place in the Crown Chakra. As Druids, we practice this every day as we bring 'the light of the earth' through our body and release it again to the earth!

Dear Druids,

Be patient and stalwart in the dance of transformation.

We know the elements well. Fire burns us to ash, Water takes us on a journey to the sea, Air releases us from old bonds, and we land once again, securely planted in the Earth.

Over the last year, I have been traveling through one of these 'transformative' events. Since I'm an astrologer, I used astrology to guide me. But astrology

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is not easy to share in an introductory article. I turned to Alchemy as another way to describe a process we all experience, but can't always identify as universal.

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Sarah Fuhro and Bruce Lhuillier are members of OBOD and the Mystic River Grove in Eastern Massachusetts.

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INTERVIEW WITH DAMH THE BARD: MUSICIAN, PENDRAGON, DRUID, PART 1

BY DAVID NORTH

> *"I think that once you have a spirituality that doesn't look out to the stars for salvation, and actually looks to our home as a Divine Being, you can't have anything other than a linked spiritual path and political beliefs."*
>
> *~Damh the Bard, OBOD Pendragon*

CLICK HERE TO LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW*

OR READ THE TRANSCRIPT BELOW

Recorded Jan. 9, 2017

David North: This is David North from Druid Magazine, and I have the pleasure of being joined today (through the magic of Skype) by Damh the Bard. As you may know, Damh is an international recording artist who has, through music and deed, helped define the modern pagan movement. Dave—which is his given name—is also the pendragon of our Order; and it's interesting to note that while he completed through the 'Druid' grade in OBOD, he then asked to be re-initiated permanently as a 'Bard,' as it was the bard—the musician and storyteller—that spoke to him the most. I've heard Damh tell a few stories and sing a few songs, and I can attest that he is a master at both.

Damh, my first question for you, however, is about your title, "Pendragon." I looked up the definitions of pendragon, and it literally translates as "Head Dragon," and figuratively as "chief prince, warrior, or 'one wielding great power'" …typically in the context of a kingdom, tribe, or organization. So, what does the title 'Pendragon' mean to you?

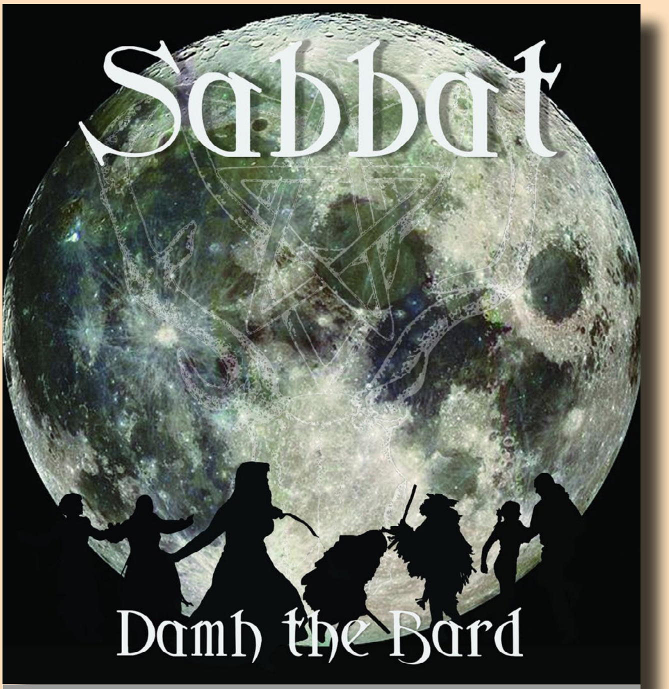
Damh the Bard: I was initiated as the pendragon in 2010, and when I was asked, it was an honor because of the lineage that came with it, really, but I didn't know entirely what it meant. I think it probably means a different thing to each pendragon: I think each pendragon has had their own role to play within the Order. And I think it was a couple of years in, really, that I kind of realized what the role of pendragon meant to me. Obviously, pendragon means 'head dragon,' and it's a role and part of the triad of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids; along with chosen chief and scribe. Obviously, the chosen chief is Philip Carr-Gomm, the scribe is Stephanie Carr-Gomm, and I'm the pendragon. And what I realized is that the chosen chief, Phillip, is like, "the buck stops here." He's the boss if you like. Steph is the engine room of the mechanics of

**If you cannot see the audio controls, either click on this link instead, download the pdf, or see other technical resolutions here* getting the course out. She's the office manager and secretary, if you like, and so that suits the scribe. I think the way my music has worked over the years, and how it's kind of shaped the way my life is, pendragon to me became ambassador. It's like having one foot in the Order and the other foot out of it; and bridging that kind of gap between non-magical folk and other pagan traditions and all that kind of stuff—with what the order is, and Druidry as a whole—so that's what it meant to me.

David North: You implied earlier that you were not the first: Have there been prior pendragons?

Damh the Bard: There have. The first pendragon was Vera Chapman. She was Nuinn's pendragon. She was a writer and she founded the Tolkien Society. She passed that onto Will Worthington who is an artist. He's the artist who has done the artwork for the Druid Animal Oracle, the Druid Plant Oracle, the Druid Craft Tarot…and he then passed it onto me and I'm a musician. So if you look at the pattern there, you had a writer, an artist, and a musician; all people who communicate their Druidry and their spiritual beliefs through the kind of conduit of their chosen art form. That again kind of made a nice pattern—a nice bit of sense to me to take it onboard and to take it over. Will was pendragon for 19 years, which is a good Metonic cycle and quite long enough I should think for anybody to hold that responsibility, and he just wanted to pass that on. I was asked to take over, and it's a great honor!

David North: One of your podcasts recently featured a personal anecdote about a recent performance you gave at a renowned concert hall in Britain. I found that very moving. Can you tell us a little bit about why that was a formative musical experience for you?



© Cerri Lee

Damh the Bard's latest CD, his eighth

Damh the Bard: Music has always been my first love. Since I was a tiny baby singing at the top of my voice, I was driving my mom and dad completely mad. You know I've always loved music more than anything else. When all my friends were into football I was into listening to music. I started to learn to play the guitar when I was eight years old, and this whole journey started to me with those—you know—with singing along with The Rockin' Horse and I'm singing along with The Sweet, and Slave, and that kind of stuff back in the seventies; and John Denver and Johnny Cash, whom my Dad weaned me on. That kind of led me into finding the music that I loved, which was folk, and also heavy rock.

I saw my first ever live concert at the Brighton Centre in 1978, and it was Thin Lizzy. And I sat on the balcony looking out across Brighton Centre and Thin Lizzy came on stage, and the sound and power of that rock night completely changed my life forever. Over the years I've seen AC/DC with Bon Scott at the Brighton Centre. I've seen Black Sabbath with Ronnie James Dio, Status Quo—I mean so many bands at that place—Motorhead, all of them. John Denver, actually, I saw there with my dad! And this year, there's an annual event called Witchfest that has been taking place in Croydon (near London) for many years, but that venue closed down and they chose the Brighton Centre to play at, to hold their event; and I traditionally play a concert in the evening at Witchfest.

So, I found myself in December last year walking through the back stage and heading towards the stage that I've seen all those iconic bands on, and then stepping out on stage and looking out just as Phil Lynott would have done, and Ronnie James Dio would have done, and Bon Scott would have done—at that same venue—imagining where I was for all those different bands, you know. And as I walked on, all I could think about was that little eight-year-old boy who decided to play the guitar, and there I was playing on that same stage to nearly three-thousand people. It was like—it was a moment, you know.

© John Beckett

Damh and his wife, artist Cerri Lee, at the East Coast Gathering in 2014

David North: Well, considering your spiritual path then vs. now, how does one inform the other over the timespan, that journey?

Damh the Bard: Well, in truth, when I was eight years old I didn't have a spiritual path. As far as I was concerned, what I was being told by my teachers was right, and there was a Jesus and all that kind of stuff. But, what happened is, when I became a teenager, like many teenagers, I developed an interest in magic and the occult. I discovered the writings of Allister Crowley and the Golden Dawn, and all of that kind of stuff; and so my early interest and introduction to all of this stuff was actually magic—it wasn't the spiritual path—it was actually magic. And so I joined a ceremonial magic lodge when I was about 18, and I followed that through for a good number of years, to be honest with you.

But then what I found was the same kind of thing that turned me away from Christianity, which was that feeling that it was a very Middle Eastern based philosophy and not part of my way, and my land, suddenly pushed me and said, "Well, neither is this!" Because, most of the gods I was working with in ceremonial magic were Egyptian, you know, and I suddenly wanted to look for something a lot more earthy, a lot more Shamanic—let's put it that way. I put my feelers out. I explored Wicca, and I explored Witchcraft, I looked to the Northern Traditions.

But then what happened was I sent off for a leaflet from the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids like everyone else does, and when that leaflet came through and I read about the tradition of the Bard, and the storyteller, and of Taliesin, and Myrddin, and Amergin, and those archetypal bards—suddenly I found my heart completely racing, and I just felt—I thought, "I've come home. This is it! This is what I've been looking for." So, I sent off for the course in April, 1994, I think it was, and, yeah, the rest is history, and I'm still here however many years it is later!

David North: So, would you say—are your spiritual beliefs very much in concert with your political beliefs? Do you see them separate, or intertwined? Obviously, you do a lot of activism for different causes.

Damh the Bard: I think that once you have a spirituality that doesn't look out to the stars for salvation, and actually looks to our home as a Divine Being, you can't have anything other than a linked spiritual path and political beliefs. It's inseparable from that point onwards. If it is separated, then it's incongruous and eventually it's going to cause somebody trouble. For instance, when I found Druidry, I worked for an agricultural company. I didn't just work for an agricultural company, I owned one. Part of my company was working with the Monsantos and Zenecas and ICIs of this world.

As I got deeper and deeper into my Druidry, I found I just couldn't square that with what I was feeling. So, within three years or so…of following the Druid course and still being part of that world, I sold my company to my partner and left it completely (laughs)—"good and evil." You know, so yeah, it affects everything. It stops being a spiritual life and a political life and a whatever else kind of life, and just starts to be "life."

END OF PART ONE

Join us next issue when Damh shares his thoughts on music, ideas about the Modern pagan movement, and its future. A few previews:

- "And I thought, 'that was it!' I probably would never make an album like that again."
- "The only thing I don't want to see is Paganism conform to the degree that it loses its teeth."
- "…This is going to keep me busy for at least the next four years."

~Damh the Bard

IN THE NEXT ISSUE…

PROTECTION & RESISTANCE

DEADLINE: JULY 1, 2017

A LEGACY OF DRUIDS: CONVERSATIONS WITH DRUID LEADERS

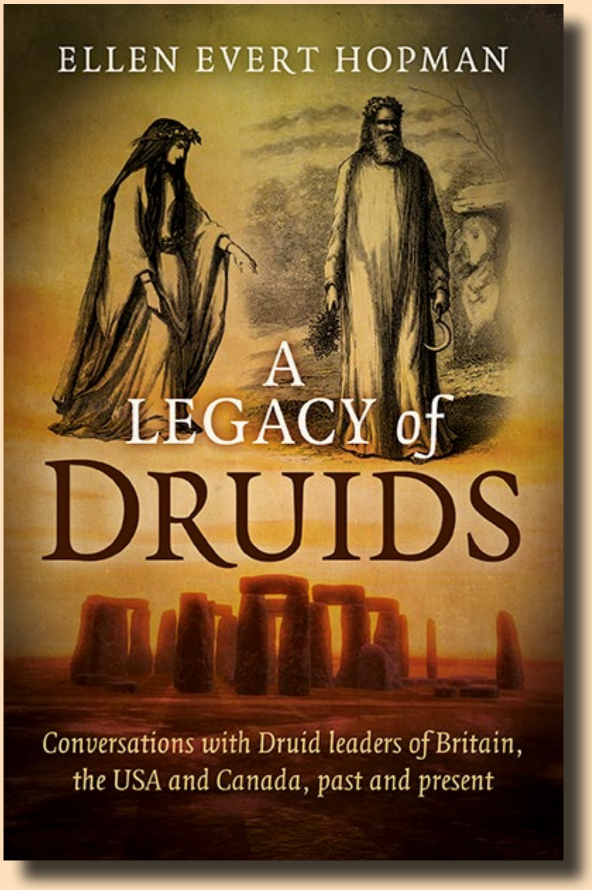
BY ELLEN EVERT HOPMAN

The following is an excerpt reprinted with permission from Hopman's book, A Legacy of Druids: Conversations with Druid Leaders of Britain, the USA and Canada, Past and Present (Moon Books, 2016). Among the interviews she conducted over some 20 years, Hopman talks with Philip Carr-Gomm, Mara Freeman, and many other Druid scholars, including Dr. Ronald Hutton...

Dr. Ronald Hutton

Interview conducted through the mail
July 16, 1996

Dr. Ronald Hutton is a professor of history at the University of Bristol, England. He is a Doctor of Philosophy, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, winner of the Hadley Prize and Blackburne-Daniell Prize of the University of Cambridge, and of the Benjamin Franklin Prize of the Bookseller's Association of America, as well as a member of several Druid Orders. He will not confirm (or deny) that he is himself a Druid, but prefers to be regarded as an academic who understands and defends modern Druidry and is expert in certain aspects of history which are important to it.


ELLEN EVERT HOPMAN
A LEGACY of DRUIDS
Conversations with Druid leaders of Britain, the USA and Canada, past and present

© Moon Books

Ronald is the author of seven books including *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* (Basil Blackwell, 1991), *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford University Press, 1994) and *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1996). He has written a number of pamphlets including The Shamans of Siberia (Isle Of Avalon Press, 1993) a popular publication among Pagans, and has authored more than thirty essays, some of which have appeared in *Paganism Today* (eds. Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey, Harper-Collins, 1996) and in *The Druid Renaissance* (eds. Philip Carr-Gomm and Dwina Murphy-Gibb, Harper-Collins, 1996). Since 1996, Ronald Hutton has gone on to publish eight more books, of which the most recent is *Pagan Britain* (2013).

Can you please talk about your religious upbringing when you were a child?

I can fairly claim to be a second generation Pagan, as I was brought up by a widowed mother who imbued me with a view of nature as full of immanent divinity and a particular love and respect for the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, which I later supplemented with that of early Ireland.

Hers was a very romantic, unfocused, Edwardian sort of English Paganism, and she did not belong to any formal or initiatory tradition. However, when I encountered Wicca in 1968, I regarded it easily and affectionately enough as a mystery religion, drawing mainly upon Greco-Roman imagery, which took its place very appropriately within the broader Pagan culture to which I belonged.

I have never experienced any sort of conversion experience, and have never had any sort of personal relationship with Christianity, which I have always regarded with benevolent neutrality. My religious 'temperature' had always therefore been lower than that of many of my Pagan friends, and I have long taken for granted assumptions like the divine feminine, which they are often inclined to regard as the end product of a major shift of consciousness.

How did you first hear about Druids? What drew you to them?

I assume this question refers to the modern variety, the ancient kind being a natural component of my British historical heritage. There was very little sense of Druidry on the British Pagan scene in the 1970s and early 1980s, Wicca making most of the running. By the 1980s writers like Caitlin and John Matthews were establishing a distinctive, Celtic, strain of modern British spirituality, but there was nothing distinctively Pagan about it.

Towards the end of that decade I became aware of the appearance of people calling themselves Pagan Druids, but they were confined to the more determinedly 'alternative' ends of British Paganism, being concentrated around Glastonbury or associated with the campaign to reopen Stonehenge at festival times. It was only around 1990, with the success of the re-founded Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, that Druidry began to make a real impact upon the Pagan mainstream.

What led me to get to know it? I began meeting representatives of OBOD at Pagan Federation local conferences in 1991-2, where we were on the lists of speakers together, and I liked them. In 1993 I met both Philip Carr-Gomm and Philip Shallcrass at a large conference at Avebury, which was the origin of the Gorsedd there, and befriended both; as a result I was invited by both to address events which they organized for Druids, and came to be very fond of their respective Orders.

Over the years 1993-4 I found myself repeatedly in the role of peacemaker between Druidry and Wicca, as the former too often defined itself at the expense of the latter, and the latter reacted angrily. This process meant that I drew a number of leading Druids much closer to the Craft, and felt it only right to show a proportionate closer interest in their ways.

I lent my assistance as an academic expert witness to Arthur Uther Pendragon's case before the European Court of Human Rights to obtain access to worship at Stonehenge, and he knighted me into his Order as a gesture of comradeship in late 1995. Through my frequent appearances as a speaker at Druid events, I have also come to know, and to enjoy friendly relations with all the other British Druid Chiefs.

How would you define Druidism and the Druid path?

I would define it as the means by which certain groups of people have succeeded, at various times over the past two thousand years, in creating a contemporary spirituality which draws upon religious and magical images deriving ultimately from the Iron Age of the British Isles. These movements have been in an important sense cumulative, as each has drawn upon all those which have occurred before, and in their later manifestations they have extended their range of symbols and sacred sites to incorporate those from all the earlier periods of British and Irish prehistory.

In an important sense there can be no 'authentic' Druidism (I prefer from habit the term 'Druidry'), because we shall never know enough about the original Druids to use them as a point of reference. All our earliest records of them were written either by Greek or Roman outsiders bent on demonizing or eulogizing them, or medieval Irish Christians, who in turn regarded them in extended retrospect, either as romanticized magicians or as evil Pagans.

The Bards of medieval Wales and Ireland were, in fact, the sponsors of the first Druidic 'revival'. The Druids are the figures who dominate the spiritual life in the British Isles and neighboring parts of Europe as history begins; they are the obvious symbolic point of reference for those trying to rediscover or re-imagine a spirituality rooted in these particular lands.

You are something of an expert in the area of Pagan history. Can you compare and contrast Druidism and Wicca?

Yes, I can do that, but only for Britain as in the U.S.A. the context is rather different. Druidry made an impression upon the modern Pagan scene in America much earlier, and British Druidry has yet to produce scholars of the weight of Isaac Bonewits and Ceiswr Serith. The number of American Druids who are fluent in Celtic languages (in old or modern forms) still far exceeds that of their counterparts in Britain; and come to think of it, only since 1989 has British Wicca produced writers of the intellectual rigor of Margot Adler or the polemical challenge of Aidan Kelley or (conversely) Don Frew. On the other hand, the U.S.A. still has many more real fundamentalists of both persuasions, with a seemingly limitless credulity for foundation myths, than Britain now harbors.

Here goes. British Wicca is much longer-established than British Druidry, and its identity is far more fixed; conversely, it lacks some of the raw energy of the younger movement, being rather less prone to flexibility, experimentation and adaptation. It is much more strongly a mystery religion, carried on in private and with only initiates present except at specific more open festivals.

Druidry by contrast courts public attention and involvement, holds daylight rituals as prominently as those of night and the tween-times, and (save in the higher grades of the mystic Orders) is much more open to friends and relatives (including children) of members.

Ritual is central to Wicca and peripheral or occasional in some Druid Orders and costume is definitive for most Druids. Wicca normally creates a level of intensity of experience rare in Druidry, and has a more pronounced sense of creating and controlling its sacred space; it is also inclined to be far more risqué and dramatic, incorporating nudity and sexuality and achieving altered states of consciousness in a way which is also unusual among Druids.

Druidry has very little sense of working magic, and energy is only regularly raised through the 'awen' chant: magic and energy raising are integral to Wicca. Druidry is far more concerned with healing the ills of its members, the land, and the planet, and is proportionately now much more mixed up with radical politics than Wicca. It is also more closely allied to 'alternative' lifestyles and the New Age. It is also more concerned to produce literature, art, and music.

Although there is no doubt that Pagan Druidry is non-sexist, its Orders are still overwhelmingly led by men, with women increasingly self-assertive at the second rank. By contrast Wicca is built upon the notion of female power. I find myself constantly refreshed and comforted by Druidry, and constantly exhilarated and challenged by Wicca. The intensity of affection which each produces for fellow group members is the same. If the 'flavor' of Druidry is that of a fine Rhine wine, then that of Wicca is of an old Scotch whisky (and Shamanism of a Bloody Mary).

There are a number of interesting ironies in each. Wicca traditionally claims to be the religion of the peasant masses of Europe, earthy and concerned with folk magic and fertility, but is in essence a refined, Neo-Platonic set of mysteries which draw heavily upon Freemasonry and the Golden Dawn, in very creative and novel ways.

Druidry claims to be the tradition of poets and intellectuals, but its modern membership is often far more rough-edged than Wiccans, and it is far more engaged in environmental issues. Wicca draws its religious imagery from all over ancient Europe, with an especial debt to the Mediterranean and the Near East, but is actually the only religion which England has ever given the world. Druidry claims to be the essentially native, British, tradition but although its main strength is in England its sources of inspiration are in the other (Celtic) parts of the British Isles, originating in languages which hardly any British Druids either read or speak. Druids name themselves after Iron Age magi, but hardly ever gather at Iron Age monuments; instead they focus overwhelmingly upon Neolithic and early Bronze Age sacred sites which Iron Age farmers cheerfully destroyed. What both clearly have in common is that they tolerate me with remarkable good humor as I point out such problems as these.

How were you trained in Druidry?

In Druidry, only by reading the standard OBOD correspondence course, which is the model of its kind and a monument to the genius of Philip Carr-Gomm; but then there is not much training as such around in the other Druid orders, which just get on with doing things.

What in your opinion does Druidry have to offer to society in general, and how would you like to see it evolve in the future?

Much of my reply is suggested above. I would like to see it take its place along with Wicca, Shamanism, Asatru, etc., as one of a very large range of different spiritual experiences, to suit very different human needs, in a new pluralist and privatized world of Western religion, based upon small gathered groups working within specific traditions within an atmosphere of disestablishment and mutual tolerance enforced by a secular state. I would also like to see Arthur Pendragon, Tim Sebastian, Rollo Maughling and others take their place in a pantheon of English folk-heroes who confronted established authority in the name of popular liberties, using motifs drawn from deep in the British folk-memory.

© Ellen Evert Hopman

Author Ellen Evert Hopman

A SELF-IMPOSED INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST SOPHIA KELLY SHULTZ

BY NICOLE SUSSURRO

Co-organizer of the upcoming MAGUS gathering, Nicole Sussurro interviews Sophia Kelly Shultz, an artist on the board of directors of Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary who has provided wonderful artwork for Druid Magazine.

© Coriander Focus Photography

Nicole: ***Can you give us a little of your background?***

Sophia: I've been working as a professional artist for 34 years, but there is physical evidence that I have been drawing since I was old enough to hold a pencil. These days my favored media are watercolor and colored pencil (sometimes, but not usually, used in conjunction with one another). I also work in textiles, doing what my best friend calls "insane beadwork and needlework," award-winning costumes, and writing. My Oracle deck, The Stone Circle Oracle, (Schiffer Publishing, 2013), has been very well reviewed, and I am eagerly awaiting the release of my new Oracle, The Promethean Oracle, later this year.

For the sake of convenience, I identify as a shaman, but not in the traditional Northern European sense. I am a listener. I am in my 12th year as a member at Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary, and now, in addition to being Vendor Coordinator, I am a member of the board of directors. I spend much of my summers out at Four Quarters, taking in the creek and the beautiful flora. This year I am also planning Stones Rising, which will have an ancient Egyptian theme.

Nicole: ***What are the main sources of***

your inspiration?

Sophia: I am continually inspired by Four Quarters. The Land brings out the creator in me, and almost all of my paintings have been conceived, worked on, or finished there. The standing Stones alone are a source of creative energy, and I find myself often having to resist their allure in favor of paying work or other imagery.

My godfather in Palo (an Afro-Caribbean religion, of which I am not an initiate—I'm special apparently because I am already on the right path) says that the spirits love me. In his case, the spirits he's referring to are the gods of that religion, but I feel that I am inspired by all spirits, particularly—but not limited to—the Egyptian ones.

Nicole: ***What has your proudest moment to date been?***

Sophia: You know, I'll talk about myself and my art at length, but I'm having a really hard time putting my finger on the one moment that made me the proudest. This may be because my dad, who was also an artist, instilled in me the notion that I should be humble. Can we get back to this one?

Nicole: ***Sure! So what is one of the funniest things that has happened to you?***

Sophia: Yule several years ago, I determined that we were going to do something Newgrange-ish to call back the sun. At that time, the winery addition was not yet complete, so with the exception of some stuff stored in the middle, it was like a cave with one tiny window. We covered the walls with brown paper. The plan was to have everyone do a little meditation around a fire bowl and then process into the "cave," where they would be given cascarilla (ground up eggshells—chalk is VERBOTEN—it does not come off of Stones so we don't have any of it) and told to draw figures on the paper that would bring the sun back. Meanwhile, two of our fire tenders were to take the fire bowl out into the garden across the window and raise it like the sun.

Everything was going fine. People were chanting, humming, and drawing, and I was there in all my splendor—bells and furs and all—encouraging everyone to pour their hearts into bringing back the sun. When what do I see running up the road, right in front of the window, but the two fire tenders and the fire bowl! I am puzzled. Perhaps, I think, defaulting to my own sometimes spotty communication skills, I had failed to describe my plan adequately. Then they stopped—RIGHT in front of the window and set the bowl down. Clearly this was my cue, so I puffed myself up and declared, "BEHOLD! YOU HAVE CAUSED THE SUN TO RETURN!"

Everyone looked up—and then the fire tenders picked up the fire bowl and ran away with it.

"...and there it goes..." I said weakly.

I realized that my ritual was teetering on the brink of Great Little Rituals That

© Sophia Schultz

Weren't. I needed to DO something, so I puffed myself up again and boomed: "THE DAYS ARE VERY SHORT THIS TIME OF YEAR!" And then, out in the garden, the fire tenders raised up our sun. Nicole?

Nicole: ***Hang on, I just about spewed my coffee. There. So now, about your proudest moment.***

Sophia: Crap. Quite honestly, it was when my then teen-aged daughter Emily stage-managed Body Tribal 2011 for me at Four Quarters. Body Tribal is the most free-form and challenging of our events. There is always some aspect of it that forces attendees to face some part of themselves that they may have been avoiding. Sometimes it is healing via ritual, but this particular year the theme was transformation using the model of the ancient Egyptian Amduat as a metaphor (the way Jungian psychoanalysts do). She had never done anything like that before, and we were working with a complex ritual arc, particularly for the midnight ritual which was about the Sungod Re's nightly journey through the netherworld. She was amazing. And apparently, the adults working under her said that she was just like me, only younger. I still look back at that and feel so proud.

Nicole: ***Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?***

Sophia: Nah, we'll get plenty of talking in at MAGUS. I do, however, like really good black licorice.

Nicole is working her way though the Ovate grade with OBOD. She is a founding member and organizer of the Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle. She is the lead for the Northern Virginia Pagan Moot and co-visionary for the OBOD Mid-Atlantic Gathering, U.S. She lives with her husband, David North, and two fur babies.

Sophia's Links

Oracle Deck:

Publisher, Amazon, B&N

Artwork Sites:

http://sophiakellyshultz.artworkfolio.com

http://badgersoph.deviantart.com

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Living Druidry

CYCLING

BY FAUCON OF SAKIN'EL

The man could not be distinguished as young or old, just sitting there on the jut of damp beach. Everything about seemed gray, as often the way of this place where the clear stream meets the fan of ocean foam, but not desolate until he came. The patch of sand there was alternately swept by stretching ridge of dying wave, then next by a surging from the narrow stream in an attempt to hold back the moon. His life seemed to have no more purpose than to melt into the gray, to be one with the timeless struggle.

"You should teach," they all had said. "You really have a gift. People love to hear you speak and you know so much. Everyone needs the help you can give." So he attempted to tell what he knew and instruct people about the folly of their ways and the chaos in their lives. He showed them a better way and talked of truth and discipline and the need to prepare for the harsh winter of their intellect. Most turned away and even laughed. Even those who became inspired lost interest when he could not give all of the answers. "If they didn't want answers what did they want? If they have no desire to learn what is there for me to do?"

Even on the shadowed beach there were distinctions amongst the gray stones and the man began selecting individual pebbles for their uniqueness of shape, shade, or unnamed appeal. "This represents what I know," he murmured to himself. "If I had to select one to give away, how would I choose without knowing the reason or purpose for the choice?" And he thought long on this revelation until the tide had all but buried the stones. It was only then that the man noticed the ancient one at his side but sensed somehow that he had been there a long while. The Druid picked up a single stone from those the man had not been able to order by himself and handed it over, saying, "This one, I think, would smile more in a mountain brook."

The man's life was changed that day and he no longer tried to teach. Instead he shared stories about leaves caught in swirling eddies and thistle-down being confused with the stars. He talked about the simple things he knew and let each man select for himself anything of value. When pressured to instruct or give advice he would say, "Ask instead about the smile of a stone." Then he would share a tale, or ask questions as in a riddle.

"When a child succeeds to the top of a granite boulder is it not futile to point out there was a surer path, or to describe how you had climbed a bigger rock in your youth? Would it not be better just to ask, 'What do you see from up there?' and share a new view of the world."

"When a man attempts to show affection for his wife in the giving of a rose or the remembering of a date, is he not trying to 'teach' her how to love? Would it not be better to create an atmosphere of affection and in the words of Moses, 'Let thoughts distill like dew'?" (Deut. 32:2 New International Version).

When questioned over the problems of teaching the youth of today and even the impossible task of instructing adults in manners of health, safety, and salvation, he would rub the stone beneath his cloak. He would question back, "Does new technology that has made it possible for someone to teach themselves destroy the atmosphere of learning? If everyone is now a teacher, who is the student and what is the lesson?"

The man became a wanderer in mind and of land and always carried that stone close to his heart. He came to know that indigenous people revered great rocks as sleeping lonely people waiting for someone to sing to them. He learned many things but found few that were powerful enough to teach, or risk the pain. He spent time on the streets with the desolate and helpless, and found there also people waiting as great stones for a song that would teach them how to live, but who had lost the ability to learn. But his own world became rich in color and vibrant hues with flickering lights and laughing children. He felt a kinship with all men and a peace that comes from letting feelings "fall as gentle rain on tender grass."

He came across many who would teach the way to God and learned much when there was an atmosphere of growth and search for truth, but felt betrayed when told that learning was not his choice to make. Did not, Merton, the greatest scholar of our time, say before his death, "What we have to be is what we already are?" (Merton, 1975, p. 308). In his learning the growing man taught himself many things and knew that it was the search for a suitable spot to place the ocean pebble that drove him on. As the man grew older and wise he constantly asked himself, "When Christ said 'give up all that you have and follow me' is it possible this instruction had nothing to do with material things? Is not the failure of teaching that it must be combined with pride, arrogance, and even deceit?" He learned many things about himself that could never be taught to another, but also knew there was no greater joy than to see something clearly and to share that inspiration with another. "Is that not enough?"

He came to listen to the whispers of yearning spirits and found profound thoughts in unexpected places. Profound knowledge may come from great books and anguished scholars, but wisdom comes from those who have lived! Years are less important than passion and intensity, for in fact, peace of spirit and self-doth strip years away. He came to listen in the market place of mothers of many children. He came to listen to those who worked with their hands and molded Goddess' gifts into tools of men. He listen to the artist, the street performer, the children's minstrel show attempt, and the poor poet in the smoky tavern. He learned simple truths like, "Never doubt in darkness that which you believe in sunlight." His betraying pride and hubris slipped away when he discovered that, "There is nothing noble about besting another. Nobility is wrought from being better today than you were yesterday." Long years became reduced to appreciation of seasons, weeks of commitment, days of fulfillment and moments of joy. At length, his anguished search came near to end with the words of an aging priest at an outdoor mass: "Unless the pilgrim carry with him the thing he seeks, he will not find it when he arrives." Peace! Surrender. Find innocence.

One day the teller of stories felt courageous enough to climb to a hidden glade and sing to the silent pinnacles. He rested there in a shady glen where most everything was green, as often the way of such a place where the reflected light from pacing stream yearned upward to dance with the bright light from above. This interplay created an illusion of motion as if a breeze were blowing that gave life to every stone and fern and wayward leaf. The array of subtle colors was astounding! And then he knew! He tossed his lifelong friend into the glistening pool and heard its laughter above the tinkling of the spring. He mused again over his life and selected a different stone from the tiny shore and listened to the song of the wind that wasn't there, but only in his heart.

The particular spar of sand on which he had sat many years before was gone with the shifting time; but the mixing of water about his feet was magic; the salt with the fresh, the birth of life with life's renewing. The rocks that sheltered the cove shown in a hundred shades of blue and teal and dove and black. The moldering sky teased with the light and let an occasional ray break through to pierce a green-gray edge of falling wave. In a brief azure sharing, a tiny fish could be seen trying to learn how to ride the crest. A mountain stone fell silently from his hand.

The woman stood alone in grief and kicked at the tumbled pebbles along the beach. "Why, why?" she wailed. "What is the meaning of it all? Can't someone teach me how to survive?" Her despair was such a force that all reason and hope were driven from her. "Teach me. That is all I ask. Please teach me!"

A child with ancient eyes came close, selected a colored stone and pressed it into her hand. "Would not this stone smile more in a mountain stream?"

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faucon is protector of a primordial area known as Shernai with woods, stream, trails, deer, turkey, fox, and more. Limited guests share the glyn for spiritual inspiration, writing, song, and celebration in connection with North Carolina's White Oak Grove, affiliated with the New Order of Druids.

PRACTICAL DRUIDRY

ASTRAL TRAVEL: A GROUP MEDITATION

BY SELENE BLACKWELL

Is it possible to meet up with another person in the astral on purpose with relatively the same memories of what was said and what happened? Recently I've been working in the Ovate Grade of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids (OBOD), and this question of astral travel inspired this experiment in practical magic.

I come from a scientific background, so I decided to address this question through the scientific process by identifying a hypothesis, variables, and outlining a methodology. I began by identifying the controlled variables. In a scientific study, controlled variables are quantities that a scientist wants to remain constant. In this experiment, astral location, physical location, Jasmine blossom incense, grounding stone, and energy wards were the controlled variables. Manipulated variables are the things being altered, in this case objects left in the astral during our meeting in the astral. Responding variables are things that change as a result of changes in the manipulated variables. Spirit energy was our responding variable. The two subjects in this experiment were myself and Elm Dealandé, an unaffiliated solitary Druid practitioner. We also solicited the help of Basil Greywood, who is in OBOD's Bardic Grade, to act as a non-biased intermediary.

Our experiment consisted of four steps: the first, to identify a neutral area within the astral realm to meet. Second, we wanted to determine if it was possible for each subject to identify an object in the realm left by the other. Third, we tested whether both subjects could meditate at the same time in the same astral location while physically residing in different places for the purpose of meeting up and communicating. Fourth, we tested whether we could communicate in the astral plane.

Results from steps one and two consisted of reports from myself and Elm to our non-biased intermediary. I reported that "I swam between two pillars of stone and emerged from the water into a cavern. There was flat rock in a semicircle and then walls on all sides like a cave but the ceiling was higher and there was light coming in from an opening at the top that faced the sea. The flat rock surface looked like it had been weathered down by years and years of water that had since receded. I left a conch shell." Elm stated, "Using the name given I found a cavern, open on top. I flew down and it was very cool, damp, and rocky. I saw a small pool of water. I saw a cairn, and beside it, a conch shell."

During step three, Elm left a light-brown feather above a cairn. I found a gold feather above a cairn. According to the intermediary, both were described as the same size and weight and in the same location and position as each other.

My report to the intermediary in step four stated:

> I travelled via the ocean from my private Astral Grove to the neutral Astral Cavern. I web my feet and hands and make my clothing tight to the skin so I can swim better. After arriving, it wasn't long until I felt an energy presence from the top of the cavern and looked up to see Elm flying in. She had red hair, a green flowing dress, and white wings. My heart palpitated four times because I was excited at actually sensing her energy. Next thing I know, she's bouncing all up and down in place. I said hello and, after a minute, I hear her say hello, too. I asked her what she did today, but I had to focus on her face and yell for her to hear me. I could tell she was concentrating on me just as hard, but her speech was all garbled as if I was below water and she was above water. At the end of her talking, I heard very clearly the words "ummm… so delicious!" I noticed Elm only stayed in the light and never went into the shadow. As soon as I jumped back in the water, I heard: 'Selene! Get … back here!' and that took me straight out of the water. I jumped up, laughed, and hugged Elm—and I felt her energy on my left side and her wings around me. She was warm. I came out of the astral by the same way I entered.

Here is Elm's report on the journey:

> I flew into the cavern, but I'm a bit claustrophobic, so I stayed in the areas of sunlight. It's my police training, too; I have to have a way out. I'm wearing my typical green meditation dress, and I saw Selene standing there with her black wet suit leggings, a wet shirt, webbed feet, and hands. Being an empath, I felt her energy and saw her belly getting all butterfly-like. Then I felt fluttering in my heart, and it was her energy. Her head just burst with excitement and adrenaline. I got excited and started jumping up and down! I

> also noticed that when I focused on her my surroundings would get blurry, but when I tried to focus on the surroundings, she grew blurry. I said hello to her and I think she asked something about what I was eating so I described my dinner to her. When she talked, it was like a gurgling sound as if she was talking underwater. I turned around and she was gone, so I called "Selene! Get back over here!" And next thing I know, I'm in the middle of a cold, wet hug and I feel her energy all over my right side.

The result supported the hypothesis that two living Druids are capable of purposely meeting up in the astral with the same memories of what was said and happened.

Uncertainties, Errors, & New Questions

I wish to do further research into which of the five senses is best for communicating in the astral. The current hypothesis is that within the astral, the strength of each of the five senses may vary from person to person due to individual personality types and neurolinguistic processing. Further study is warranted.

1. Verbal communication during Astral Travel was difficult. Did the wards, which were placed for safety, block us from communicating? Would written communication work better than verbal within the astral?

2. Color, as light energy, is determined by frequency/wavelength. Brown and orange colors of lights are relatively identical because no single wavelength exists for brown light. This discrepancy in Step Three requires further research.

3. The results brought into sharp relief just how much we have yet to learn about our universe.

Selene Blackwell, a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, avidly blogs her Ovate journey *for the purpose of gaining knowledge, generating balance, and fostering peace.*

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PUBLIC RITUAL WORKSHOP PART IV-B: RITUAL BODY, "MOVEMENT"

BY DAVID NORTH AND NICOLE SUSSURRO

"As soon as you honor the present moment, all unhappiness and struggle dissolve, and life begins to flow with joy and ease. When you act out the present-moment awareness, whatever you do becomes imbued with a sense of quality, care, and love - even the most simple action." (Tolle, 1997, p. 67)

Let's transition from our discussion of the ritual voice in the last issue to how we use the motion (or lack thereof) of our physical bodies in creating the ritual experience. I like to call it: Movement in the time of now. This is an extended "now" in which we can move, think, and experience in the moment, as so eloquently described by Tolle in the quote above.

Heron at Accotink

© David North

One popular notion in creating ritual space is that we are forming a bubble where time stops, allowing the moment to sustain as we step outside time and space. The concept of being outside time and space (as well as whether the Divine Entity is inside or outside of time and space) spans many ages and cultures, and inextricably intertwines physics and theology. In Yoga meditation (*Samadhi*), viewing an object or the universe from outside time and space is called *Nirvitarka*, or "without question" (Vishnu-Devananda, 2003, p.149–150).

Many rituals I've witnessed invoke the concept of being outside time and space in some manner at some point during the opening. However, whether invoked or not, I suggest the notion should be in our minds whenever we perform ritual: When we ground and center, cast a circle, meditate… and in every thought, word, and movement we make in ritual space. Why? In the words of Tolle: "Honor the present moment…flow with joy and ease…imbued with a sense of quality, care, and love…" (Tolle, 1997, p. 67). That is sacred movement, in sacred space.

Sacred movement and the mindset of being fully engaged in the current moment (the 'now') are joined at the hip: Each feed and enhance the other. We see this exhibited within yoga, dance, tai chi, martial arts, and many other types of spiritual, meditative, or artistic movement. Think of the graceful transitions in a yoga sun-salutation, the subtle shift between Warrior I and Warrior II poses, or the even-more subtle hand poses and breath control of *yoga mudras*, used to set the frame of mind and flow of energy through the body for ritual and meditation. This energy flow is known by many names: Spirit, Mana, Nwyfre, Inspiration…whatever term one uses to express the intent of ritual, whether for oneself or the benefit of others. Perhaps counter-intuitively, this flow of energy is not accentuated through increased effort or force, but through relaxation and peace. As ritualists, we will be at our best when we are calm, centered, then connected with the objects and beings that constitute our surroundings.

> WHEN YOU MOVE IN RITUAL, MOVE WITH DELIBERATION. MOVE LIKE YOU MEAN IT, WITH BOTH BODY AND MIND—WITH YOUR VERY BEING. THE DIFFERENCE WILL BE APPARENT TO ALL AROUND YOU.

As with most things, practice will make you better and more confident, but don't stop with just practicing: Observe, as well! Gather movement inspiration from the world around you. Many of us have probably been enchanted by the movement of leaves or snow on the winter wind or watched a particularly inspired dance piece. Even a Zumba class may have its moments! We are creatures who inhabit bodies, and those bodies are meant to move! Also, find time to watch a ballet: Notice how story, mood, and emotion are communicated through movement and music.

I'll also leave you with several group exercises. Don't be afraid to both give and receive loving feedback.

Group Exercise One: Have the group stand in a circle, equidistant from each other, facing center. One by one, take turns walking sunwise/clockwise outside the perimeter casting a circle—as might be done in ritual—with whatever implement (if any) you normally use. Each participant should focus on balance and body position while moving, and doing so with intent and deliberation. A key element in being convincing in this (otherwise simple) movement is for each caster to have a clear, concise image in their own mind of what they are doing: How is the implement used to delineate the perimeter? What shape and flow does the energy take as it's being released? What form does the final circle or bubble take, and what impact or interaction does it have with the participants? After all have had their turn, discuss part one of the exercise; then go around a second time—this time anti-sunwise/counter-clockwise, with each participant un-

Next issue is planned to be the last installment in my Public Ritual Workshop, although the Ritual Space column will continue. Do you have ideas for a Ritual Space topic that you would like to author? Perhaps you would like to share a particularly memorable ritual experience you've had, ask a question, or submit ritual-themed photos or artwork. All are welcome.

casting or dismissing the energy element they contributed on the first pass.

Group Exercise Two: Have the group stand in a circle, equidistant from each other, facing center. Altogether, visualize and create (expressing physically) an energy bubble of peace and light just inside the circle of participants. Practice, with deliberate movement inwards and outwards, contracting and expanding this bubble as a group, in unison. After completing three cycles of contraction and expansion, close the bubble to the center of the circle and ground it into the earth. Then repeat the exercise; but this time at the end, have all participants turn outwards and push the bubble outwards as far as the perimeter allows. Then, continue pushing the sphere outwards to encircle the globe, then to infinity—sending peace and light in all directions.

Group Exercise Three: Have each participant choose an element, then perform or express that element in dance or other movement, without words (sound optional).

Don't forget to take down and/or ground the energy you have raised in these exercises! That is responsible magic. Then, as is recommended for any ritual, make sure the participants eat and drink something. Some private journaling or group discussion about what you learned may be appropriate.

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David North is an Ovate Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, and facilitator of the Northern Virginia-based Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle. He writes, edits, and participates in public rituals locally and regionally.

Nicole Sussurro is an Ovate Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids and founding member of the Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle. She is a graduate of the conservatory at Otterbein University and has more than a decade of experience in the performing arts. She's married to David North and has two fur babies.

GEOMANTIC DICE

BY RICHARD "SKYLLAROS" DERKS

Geomancy, or divination by earth, is a favorite go-to in the Druid's divination toolbox. Dating back to ancient times, and gaining popularity in the Renaissance, it has seen a surge in popularity in recent times. For the Druid, geomancy is of particular interest, given that it is a form of divination so closely connected with the Earthen mysteries.

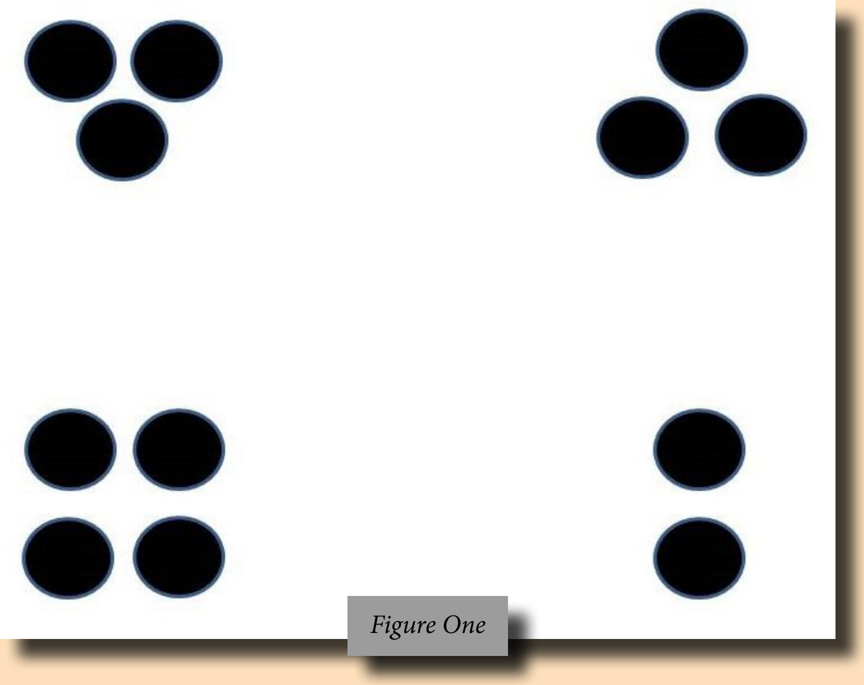
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Figure One

There are many ways to cast a geomantic chart, all of which result in the generation of geomantic forms that consist of four binary lines. Traditionally, a box of earth was used in which dots were made by randomly poking the dirt or sand with a stylus, then counting the number of dots created. This would have to be performed for each line of the geomantic forms. Another method is to simply use a coin or a set of standard dice to generate the forms.

One of the most popular methods of creating a geomantic chart is to use a shield chart (the process of which is described in John Michael Greer's excellent book *The Art and Practice of Geomancy* (2009) by Weiser books). The shield chart uses four geomantic figures known as the four mothers to generate the entirety of the chart. Those who use the method regularly may wish to invest in creating a special tool to use in the generation of the four geomantic forms. One ancient method to do this is the use of geomantic dice, a set of strung dice on which the entire four mothers can be generated with one casting of the dice.

To create a set of geomantic dice, you will need the following tools:

1. A set of wooden cubes or blank 6-sided dice sets; a total of which eight individual cubes will be needed. These can easily be obtained at any local craft store.
2. A wood-burning tool to use to imprint the markings, though these could be painted on in a pinch

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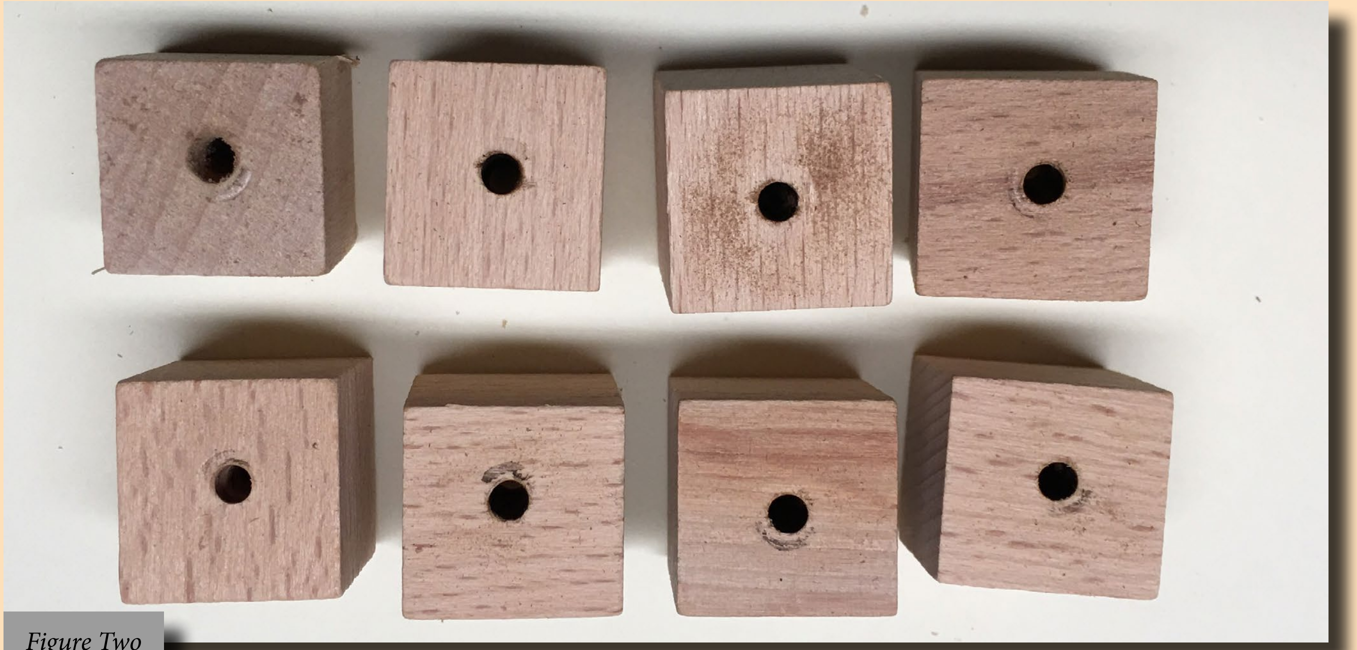

Figure Two

instead.

3. A drill to bore holes in the wooden cubes.
4. A cord of some sort to string them up together. Natural fiber cords work best; these can also be found in the beading supply section of any craft store.

The first thing you will want to do is measure the exact center of each wooden die with a ruler or protractor. Then, drill a hole in each of the die. This will produce four usable faces for each die (*see figure one*).

Following this, you will want to imprint the following four sets of dots on to one side of each of the eight die. This is best done using a wood-burning tool for a more permanent and aesthetically pleasing set of dice (*see figure two above*).

Next, if you wish, you can stain the dice or apply a finish. For a more natural and traditional look, linseed oil is a wonderful fit for this purpose. You can apply it with a paintbrush and the wood will soak in the oil. Leave the dice for about a day to make sure they are properly dry. The linseed oil will leave a faint smell on the wood for a few days that will eventually dissipate.

This will leave you with a set of eight dice that are identical. You will want to line them up in two rows of four die each and string each row die up with two cords. Leave enough space at the ends of each row so that there is one die worth of empty space at the ends. Then, tie the two cords together at each end and cap them with a bead type of your choice. Please see figure three below for the finished product.

The dice will then be ready to cast their first chart. Simply hold them and spin each row of dice so that all eight are spinning, then slam them down on the table. The markings you imprinted on

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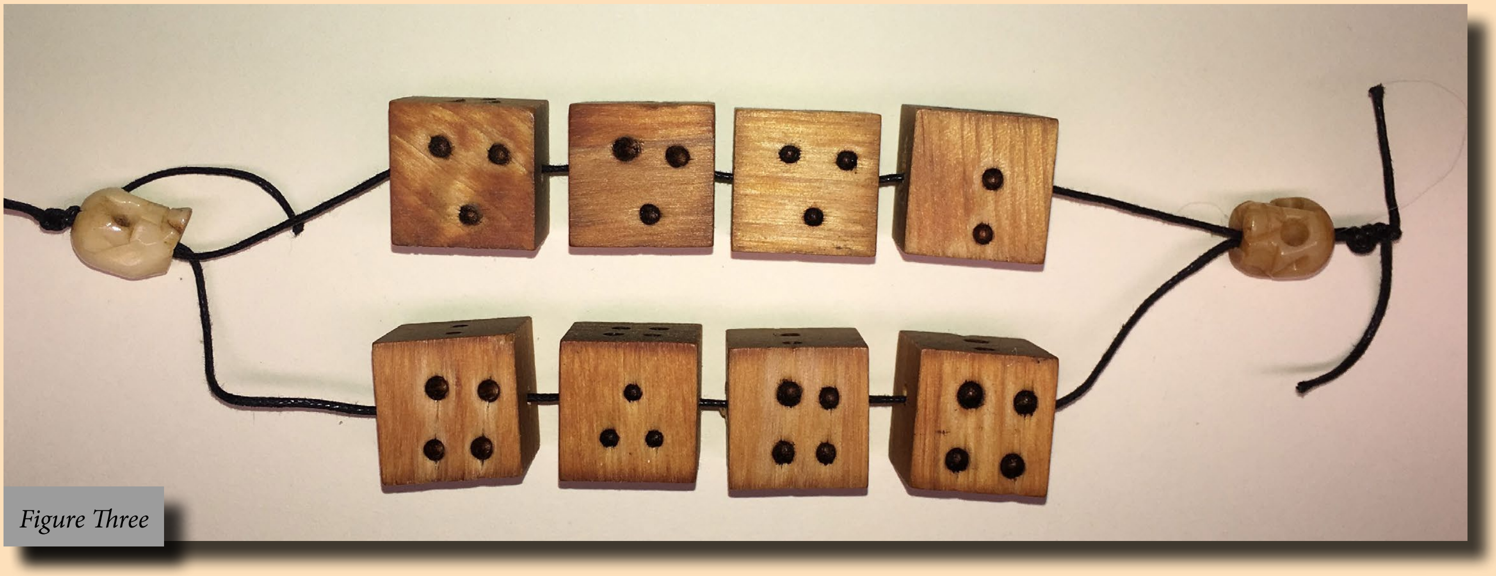

Figure Three

them are such that this will produce all four mothers at once. If more portability is desired, one can make a separate set of dice that use only individual die, as long as each one is somehow marked for the lower or upper half, perhaps by coloring them. Then this set will produce one geomantic form at a time.

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Skyllaros has been on the Druid path for about 10 years, and his own Druidry is influenced by his memberships in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids and the AODA. He considers himself a Hedge Druid, and writes about his experiences at his blog Feral Druidry.

© Teri Garrison-Kinsman

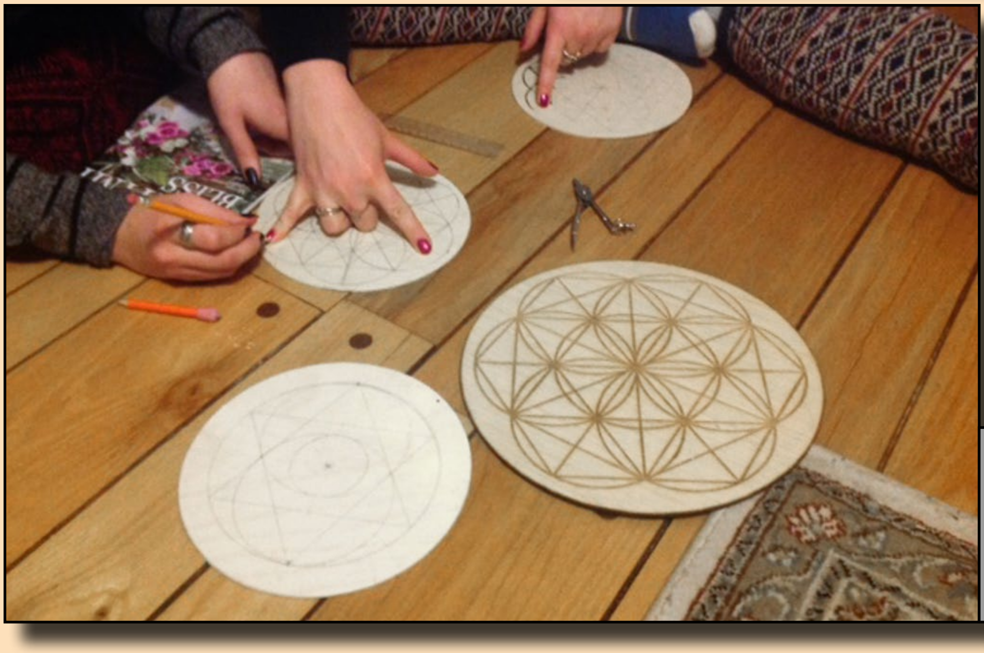
SACRED GEOMETRY: AN EVENING OF SISTERHOOD, POINTY TOOLS, & PYROGRAPHY

TEXT BY CATRIONA MCDONALD
PHOTOS BY WANDA C

What happens when you combine five talented and curious women with a raft of art supplies, a little Greek philosophy, and a dash of fire? You get some seriously awesome and powerful Awen flowing!

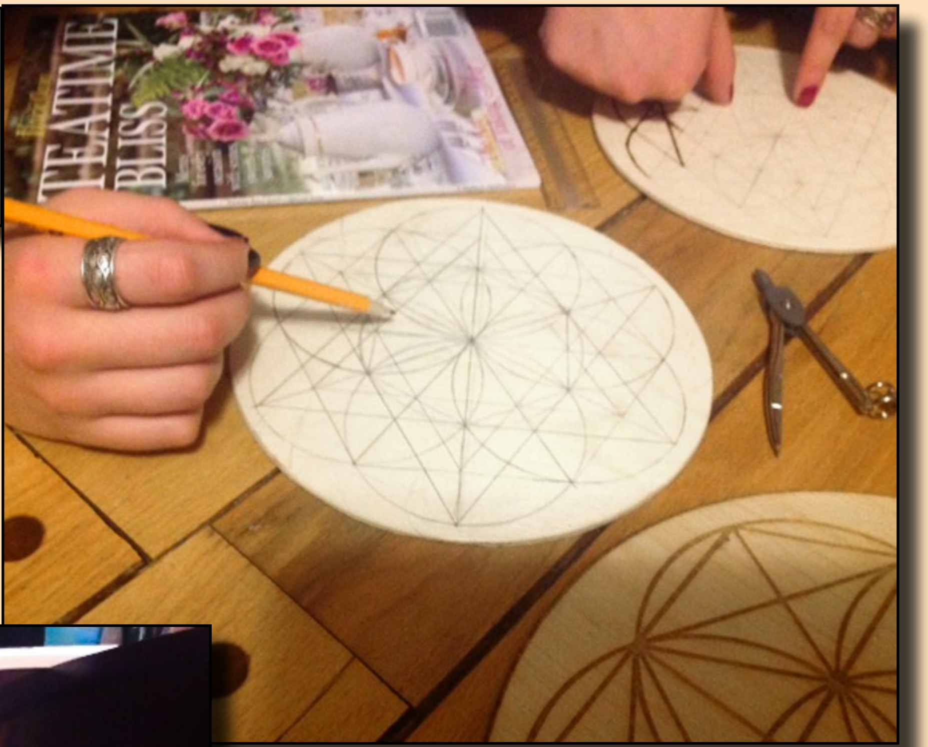
I joined Renu Aldrich, Lolly Nicol, and Madz Star at Wanda C's home in Maine over new year, and this is what resulted.

Everything begins with circles



The patterns become more complicated

Looking for points that aren't yet connected…and rectifying that



When in doubt, consult the oracle, er, Internet (*Renu Aldrich with Catriona McDonald above*).

Fire sets the final design (*Lolly Nicol right*)

One very satisfied Druid!

© Renu K. Aldrich

DM EIC’s final product at work

A 14TH CENTURY ONION PIE

BY KIRSTIE MAYLOR

"If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world." (Tolkien, p. 273)

This past Alban Arthan, I had the joy to share with the Grove near my home, the Keepers of Dragon Knowledge, a winter favorite of mine. It's a medieval recipe that dates back to at least the 14th century in England. This was based on an Ymber Day tart of onion and egg, found in the manuscript "Forme of Cury" (Master-Cooks of King Richard II, 1390). The original recipe is a bit more sweet, containing currants and poudre douce*, a sweet spice mix. The following recipe is a more savory, modern adaptation.

Onion Pie Recipe

Ingredients

2 very large sweet onions

6 Tbsp butter

2–3 Tbsp flour

1 cup sharp cheddar cheese

1/2 c whole milk (or cream...yum!!)

1 egg

Salt and pepper to taste

1–2 tsp herbs de Provence (optional)

2 crusts for pie top and bottom (refrigerated is fine)

Instructions

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Place one pie crust into bottom of a pie pan.

Slice onions into 1/8" half-rings. Place butter into large fry pan and melt. Add onions and gently sauté, tossing frequently until they begin to become translucent—but not brown. Might take about 5 min.

Salt and pepper to taste, and add herbs de Provence if you are using them. Add

© Kirstie Maylor

flour to onions in pan and toss to coat. Put onions into prepared pie plate with crust.

In a mixing bowl, beat egg and milk (or cream) together. Pour over onions. Sprinkle cheese over top.

Add top crust and seal edges together well. A little water on your fingers helps while you pinch the dough closed. You'll want to slit the top crust to ensure adequate venting; a number of holes created by a fork will suffice, or you could do as I did and cut thin lines for an Awen on the top.

I place the pie pan on a cookie sheet because it's easier to move to the oven and the filling sometimes runs over. Cover top of pie loosely with foil. Bake at 375 degrees with foil on for 30 minutes.

Take foil off and bake another 20–30 minutes until brown. A sharp knife inserted into the center will let you know if it's cooked through. Cool slightly before cutting into.

Share with friends!

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Kirstie Maylor is a Bardic grade member of Bards, Ovates & Druids (OBOD). She loves to cook and explore the world, meeting new friends at every step.

***Editor's Note**: Poudre douce ingredients varied from cook to cook, akin to modern seasoning blends. Some recipes include sugar, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, grains of paradise, and galangal. More information can be obtained here.*

FOREST BATHING

BY SHELLEY KENEIPP

Trees play a deeply important part in Druidry. We honour their key role in the healthy continuation of life upon our planet; we give thanks for the invaluable resources they gift us with, from the purely practical levels of food and wood, to the nourishment we draw from their inspiration emotionally and spiritually. Our relationships with them, allows us to feed the cells of our bodies with life giving oxygen; the inspiration they offer also feeds our emotions, stimulates our minds and sparks our creativity, opening the channels for personal growth. (Carr-Gomm, 2013, para. 1)

"Come to the woods, for here is rest. There is no repose like that of the green deep woods…Sleep in forgetfulness of all ill." (Muir, 1938, p. 235)

I am blessed to live in the area of California where there are many coastal redwood forests nearby. These ancient beauties can grow to be 300 feet tall. The oldest is now 2,200 years old. Emerging from a walk through these beautiful, magical, and giant groves, I am left with a deep sense of well-being physically, mentally, and emotionally. All the franticness, tension, and overwhelm from daily life gets erased.

The practice in Japan's health care system called *shinrin-yoku* translates into "forest bathing," which means taking a leisurely stroll for 20–30 minutes amongst the trees. This has been used to "reap health benefits for more than 30 years" (Steingrube, 2016, para. 2). In the United States, it has been used for the last 10 years by employees at Microsoft and Amazon.com in the forests outside Seattle.

In a study (Qi, 2010) on the benefits of forest bathing, the author states: "The results show that forest environments promote lower concentrations of cortisol, lower pulse rate, lower blood pressure, greater parasympathetic nerve activity, and lower sympathetic nerve activity than do city environments" (Qi, 2010, p. 18). The researchers of this study also measured natural killer (NK) cell activity in the participants. NK cells target and destroy cells deemed to be infected, damaged, or harmful to the body. This research showed forest bathing results in an increase of NK cell activity, resulting in a higher number of NK cells. The increased activity lasted for more than 30 days, suggesting that forest bathing once a month enables the body to maintain a higher level of NK cell activity.

Another benefit of forest bathing comes from taking in the impression of the color green. A study from University of Georgia found that "The color green attained the highest number of positive

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responses (95.9%)… The majority of emotional responses for the green color indicated the feelings of relaxation and calmness, followed by happiness, comfort, peace, hope, and excitement. Green was associated with nature and trees, and thus creating feelings of comfort and soothing emotions" (Kaya & Epps, 2004, p. 4).

Another study (Qi, 2009) shows breathing the air emitted by plants and trees while in the forest also has positive health benefits. Trees give off phytoncides, which are antimicrobial allelochemic volatile organic compounds. Participants were put in a room with a humidifier infused with stem oil from a Hinoki Cypress from 7:00 PM to 8:00 AM for three nights. The people had a significant reduction of NK cells and adrenal stress hormones.

Other ancient healing practices also value the benefits of nature. Ayurveda, the healing science of India that dates back more to than 3,000 years ago, translates into the "science of life." According to its principals, being in nature increases the amount of *ojas* in the body.

> Ojas is the substance in the body that is believed to be responsible for vitality, immunity, and a radiant and glowing complexion. In Western science, it is thought that ojas may be a combination of certain neurotransmitters, hormones such as oxytocin, and strains of highly functional microbes that support ojas-related functions. (Douillard, 2016, para. 16)

CONSCIOUS FOREST BATHING: A GUIDED MEDITATION

Taking a few moments to choose what forest of trees you would like to visit today. Once you have chosen the forest, finding yourself at the edge of this forest. Just before entering the forest, stopping for a moment and leaving all your worries, frustrations, or tensions behind. Upon entering the forest take three deep breaths expanding into the belly. Being aware of any smells that are present in the forest. Noticing the shapes and colors of plants and rocks on the forest floor. Closing your eyes for a moment imagining a green spiral of light descending from the base of your spine into the earth. Spiraling deep into the earth, imagining there are green roots expanding out in all directions providing a solid, but fluid grounding for you. Opening your eyes, choosing a tree of your liking. Walking over to the tree allowing your hand to touch the trunk of the tree. Tuning in and sensing the textures of the tree trunk. Bringing your attention back to the spiral of green light. You will be moving the light back up from the earth through your spine and guiding it into your hand. Moving the light through your hand up through the tree as your follow it all the way up to top of its canopy. Being aware of taking in that beautiful color of green and bathing your entire being in it. Bringing your awareness back into your body, and becoming be aware of any sounds that are present in the forest. Proceeding on your leisurely stroll, taking in all impressions and bathing in those, as well. At the end of your walk thank and bless the forest, being aware that you have received wonderful benefits that will have lasting positive effects on your physical and mental health.

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INCORPORATING INTENTION INTO THE EVERYDAY

BY LOLLY NICOL

Welcome to my new column on how to incorporate Druid beliefs and values into your secular world! I don't claim to live a fully sustainable life; I am not entirely zero waste, nor do I buy completely organic, locally produced, and fair trade products. I'm not a minimalist, tiny house owner, or vegetarian... But I do live consciously and with intention. I put thought into my actions, and I strive to make the best choices I can for the earth and myself based on where I am at any given point. Some days money is a restriction while other days it's accessibility that holds me back, and yet sometimes, I'm simply craving a food so much that I can hardly stand it even though it doesn't align with my overall goals. Life happens, part of our human beauty is imperfection, and so, each decision I make is the best I am able to offer myself at that particular moment in time.

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But who am I? Why should you care what I have to say? How did I get to this place of conscious, intentional living anyhow? I'm Lolly, gal of many trades, ever effervescent, and always learning. If you're reading this, I'll go out on a limb and say that you care about our planet, your health, and our fellow beings, which makes it worth your while to take a gander at the ideas that I'll share with you through this column. Many of the tips, tricks, and information that I'll be offering aren't hard to find, but most people don't stumble across it unless they're looking. It can also be hard to take what you read on the vast interwebs and apply it to "real" life—and it can be even harder to motivate yourself to do so if you're unsure whether it's worth the effort or time. Should you come across something like this, I invite you to send it in and I'll share any experience I may already have, or give it a try myself and report the results. It's information overload out there in our world these days, there is so much to know, and not enough time to know it, which is why I want to make it easy for you and share what I've found, right here in Druid Magazine.

As for how I got here… like anything else, one step at a time.

My conscious living choices are part of what led me to Druidry, and then my Druidry fed my conscious living habits, quickly creating a beautiful, self-feeding circuit. It is important to note that this way of life didn't start all at once. As I learned about different topics, from nature, food, and home goods to fashion, beauty, and self-care, I would make choices and changes in my lifestyle. These would subsequently lead to other topics of interest that were then adapted and edited. As life is fluid, there are always changes to be made. Now when I make changes, it's become habit to analyze my options and take time to consider the impact of my decisions. One of my most recent topics of research is fast fashion and how it impacts our environment from creation to disposal—of course this will be explored in a future column!

There are many different takes on what "Conscious Living" and "Intentional Living" are. For me, and the purposes of this column, it comes down to making choices in our lives that are less wasteful and harmful to ourselves and the environment while doing what we can to help improve and support ourselves and our surroundings. Part of why Druidry sings to my soul is my love of the environment and doing my part to help it survive and thrive. Making conscious daily decisions and putting forth the effort to decrease my negative impact and increase my positive impact on our environment are two of my favorite ways of incorporating my spirituality into my daily life.

How does all of this translate to our lives? For me, my conscious, intentional thinking spans the gamut from what products I purchase, what materials they're made of, and where they come from to what my commute is like and the purposes of the jobs I take. I take into consideration how the food I eat and the beauty, self-care, and household cleaning products I use will impact my body and the environment. I frequently buy used items, but if that isn't possible, I look for a local vendor. I always try to make a conscious choice about the quality and creation process of said item. I've recently realized how much of this I took for granted in the clothing department, thinking I was educated sufficiently on the topic and realizing that I'm not at all, so I'm now digging in deeper to learn more.

There are so very many ways to educate ourselves and make conscious choices in our lives, and so many opportunities to grow upon our knowledge. Unfortunately, much of the power to care for our earth and ourselves is lost in the hubbub of a busy life and a lack of education about what's out there. Additionally, the marketplace and the media do an incredible job of marketing products to consumers to make them think that they are "green," "healthy," or "natural" while not always telling the whole truth. Part of the realization of this column's importance came from a conversation with one editor who thought she was making good choices by utilizing a particular beauty brand and had no idea that they were feigning "natural and healthy" while still using ingredients that aren't good for you.

Ceramic waste statues, India

Throughout the progression of this column, I hope to inspire and educate you on the impact that your daily choices have on your body and your environment while helping you incorporate your spiritual beliefs into your daily mundane life. I am honored to share my journey and look forward to supporting you on yours. Remember to be kind to yourself; instituting small changes makes a big difference as each one supports the next until, all of a sudden, you have revolutionized your life.

Know that I speak from where I currently stand on my path and I have plenty to learn. I urge you to correct me if you feel that something I share is incorrect, engage me in a friendly debate if you feel so moved, or suggest a topic for future exploration. I will never be perfect, but I will continue to do my best to live consciously and with intention as my way of contributing to the big picture. I look forward to seeing you on the path!

Yours in mindful living,
Lolly

Lolly Nicol is a Bardic Grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids who enjoys incorporating various spiritualties into her practice and is often referred to by her non-OBOD peers as "a hippie, crunchy, earth mama." One of her favortite hobbies is to smile at unsuspecting strangers.

WHEN WORK QUITS YOU

BY BARBARA A. POTT

My boss walked into my office and closed the door. "Am I leaving?" I asked. She nodded with resignation. The day before I had been quite hopeful about my position there. I was a Project Manager but I envisioned more—an increase in pay if not a promotion. I thought about which new office I would get. Not the yellow one, that was too big. Not one of the offices along the south wall, those were too small. The one with windows that would soon be left vacant from a temporary consultant seemed just about right.

Back to reality, I sat there and tried not to let the tears fall. I was only partly successful. I meekly asked, "There's no place in the company for me?" She said I was welcome to apply for postings. I rolled my eyes and said with a sarcastic edge to my voice, "I know I can always apply."

She quickly asked, "Do you know what's posted?"

Why would I know what was posted? I was going to stay in my department and be successful. "No, I haven't looked lately," I said. I just wanted to get out of there.

She handed me a couple of papers and said that I was invited to participate in a career placement program the following week. The severance was fair; I was told I'd get COBRA papers within the month and would be paid for my remaining vacation days.

She collected my badge, office door key, Blackberry, and company purchasing card. I asked if I could take time to go find a box to collect my things. She said I had the choice to pack them now myself or I could let her do it and she'd send them to me. I thought she would inadvertently omit some of my things.

"No, I'd like to take them with me now."

She replied, "Boxes are in room 305." They had it all coordinated for us; it was their third large down-sizing in the past year and a half. They knew how to help us out the door, and I was actually grateful for that because I didn't want an inefficient or lengthy process getting out the door.

After she left, I closed my office door for privacy and to let the tears fall, but they didn't really come. I sat down and called my husband. "I'm out," I said. There was a pause. "You're kidding me," he said. "Nope. Can you come and help me take my things out of here?" I didn't want to juggle my box walking the long parking lot to my car. "Sure," he said. Tim was very kind to me on the phone and every time I started to blame myself he said, "You can't put this on yourself." But I kept thinking of what I could have done to save my job.

I got a large box and tape and assembled it for packing up the office I spent two and a half years making my professional home. I closed the door, not wanting anyone to see me pack because I felt humiliated. Then I thought, no, I will hold my head high and opened the door. A couple of well-meaning people stopped by to say goodbye, but they were a little too gleeful for my mood. They were keeping their jobs.

© Barb Pott

"Was there a meeting that I missed?" I asked one visitor. "How does everyone know I'm leaving?" Of course, it was obvious I was packing up on a day when many in the building were losing their job, but I felt a little paranoid at that point. I thought everyone must have been talking about the demise of my employment.

"I heard a manager say she'd give you references, and that's not the normal thing to say to someone who is staying. I also saw you taking down your pictures so I knew."

I don't remember how the conversation ended. I probably gave her body language indicating I wanted her to leave me alone, and she was kind enough to accommodate.

Most of my items were wall hangings and couldn't fit in the box. I looked around the office to make sure I had everything. Then a secretary who worked close by came and had the appropriate compassionate look on her face. She was the only one who didn't seem to be joyful. She offered, even pressed a little, to help me take my things downstairs to the lobby. I kept saying yes then no, and she understood I needed help in making that simple decision. She helped me take my things to the front door, and then she took the cart and left. I appreciated not having to carry on a conversation.

I stood by the lobby door with my box and posters waiting for Tim. I saw other people leave with boxes or bags, one accompanied by her supervisor trying to be compassionate. Usually we only had a receptionist in the lobby, but that morning we had an additional three security guards. One seemed to want to say something to me. We always acknowledged each other in the hallways, and he always gave me a nice smile. I didn't want to acknowledge him that morning. I felt on the verge of tears and didn't want to let them loose. Where was Tim?

I saw our facilities maintenance guy look down at me from the third-floor balcony. We had acknowledged each other whenever we passed by in the halls, but this time I pretended not to see him. A woman from my department walked in and quickly looked away when she saw me. Finally, Tim came.

I walked out with the box and turned to go back to get my posters. The maintenance guy appeared right behind me and carried them to Tim's truck. Tim took them from him and loaded them.

The maintenance guy looked at me and said, "You're a good person, you'll be fine."

I smiled as best I could and said, "Thanks, take care."

I had wanted to say goodbye to a handful of people who I hadn't seen yet since I got the news, but felt too humiliated to walk through the halls to find them. Sometimes co-workers don't know what to say to someone who just lost their job. It's like being at a funeral and facing the one who will grieve the most. But silently, or not so silently, I know many were relieved it wasn't them so they had a happy edge to their voices, and I didn't need that.

I got in the truck and asked Tim to drive me to my car in the parking lot. When we both got home, we took my things into the house and Tim gave me a big hug. We were going to be stressed without me working, yet he didn't put any of his stress on me. We still needed for me to have an income, but we would make do for a while.

In the end, everyone lost their job when the whole company closed for good. I'm sure the downsized group I was in included main breadwinners and single people, including parents, with no other source of income. Who knows if any of them had savings for such an event. Losing a job, even if you know it's coming, is so hard in many ways and depending on one's life situation, one element of it can be more visceral than another. I was very fortunate to have moral and financial support. I also had "transition" support from the company with workshops and resources. Because of all that, the most salient element to me was the rejection. Even though I was let go when our whole department closed, and I could see the logic and even the business necessity of it, I still felt rejected. It felt personal. I took the rest of that day simply to sit with my loss. I would start my hunt for jobs tomorrow.

Job loss can hit anyone at every level of work, in large corporations and small family businesses. Sometimes we are without a job because the one we had was just too untenable to stay and the need to get out overshadows the fear of the struggles ahead. But there are resources. (See references for a link to a Forbes article on *The 10 Best and Worst Ways to Look For a Job*.) Your state's unemployment insurance, job fairs, and resume workshops are a few resources, but it's also important to know a few other tips: A great number of jobs are filled before they are ever posted; hiring managers think of their wider network of people and often call people they know first. It's very important to get the word out there that you need a job and ask around, even if there is no job posting or "help wanted" sign. One of the jobs I held many years ago came about because I made an appointment to talk with the executive director of a non-profit simply to ask if I could volunteer. In the course of our conversation, she told me she had been thinking of hiring someone to work in the small office and asked if I would like the job. Network even if you really don't like it (see references for a good article on how to network).

If you have the financial wherewithal, the loss of a job may be a good opportunity to assess if you want a career change. I'm on my third career now and, although changing careers means starting near the bottom again, it can be very rewarding in the long run. A wonderful little book called "The Path" by Laurie Beth Jones can help you discover your calling. Our mission in life, and I believe everyone has one, isn't something we create, it's something we discover. The author writes with a Christian perspective, but the central exercise (which is not Christian based) is such a gem that it's worth working through even if you do not practice a Christian tradition with your Druidry.

Patience in finding work is difficult to maintain when you are looking at the bills piling up. Yet it's important to realize that your timeline to get hired and the company's timeline to get you hired follow different drumbeats. Companies often take weeks to offer a candidate a job for a number of reasons such as the hiring manager went on vacation, routine but lengthy internal processes, or just waiting to see the profits become favorable against the budget. All of this happens while you are falling deeper into concern about getting that first paycheck. This is why it is so important to save at least three months worth of wages, if at all possible, in case of a job loss. Nationally, it takes just over 29 days to fill an open position (Dice, 2016). That can be a long time if you have no savings to dig into. Work your magic and say your prayers, for they are of real benefit; but nothing takes the place of a well-padded savings account and staying as healthy as possible to avoid doctor trips when you may have no health insurance.

Finally, do not be afraid to talk with those you trust about your sense of loss. Chances are, they have had a similar experience and can offer you consolation, tips that worked for them, or even help in ways of which you might not have thought or for which you are too reticent to ask. Good luck!

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EISTEDDFOD

TELLING THE DIFFICULT STORY

BY GAIL NYOKA

Taking departure for Storytelling Circle in this issue, I am writing mostly about books that deal with telling stories. These stories are not in the oral tradition, but in written form.

Personal storytelling in its oral form has become popular at storytelling events, such as The Moth, which now has a radio hour on National Public Radio stations. Oral and written stories have something in common – they must both be shaped in order to make art. My own repertoire of personal stories is first written down and then spoken out loud and shaped for oral telling, which takes a slightly different form than a written work.

In *Writing Hard Stories: Celebrated Memoirists who Shaped Art from Trauma*, the authors, when interviewed, talked about the redemptive aspect of telling their stories, and spoke of the necessity of going deeply into themselves to find and examine their most painful moments. Yet, all stated that in presenting their experiences, they must tell their emotional truth without maliciousness, without the intention of hurting another person, even though this may be a side effect of their story. However, they feel that in telling their stories, they must do so without regard to what others may think of them–it is the process of telling their personal truth that gives their story its power. The memoirists felt that writing their stories helped, not only themselves, but others who could identify the pain and struggles that they had gone through.

In the afterward, Brooks (2017) states that "The worst story that we can tell ourselves is that we are alone" (p. 208). She goes on to quote author Allan Hunter, who describes pain as a little stone: "If you put it in your pocket, it weighs nothing at all. If you put it inside your shoe, it will cripple you." Hunter

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views the telling of our stories as a way to shift the weight of the pain. "You are moving the grief from where it is doing no good, to a place where you can carry it more easily."

"The more stories I heard the less space my own suffering seemed to take up. I felt less alone," states Arthur J. Frank (2013, p. 185) in *The Wounded Storyteller* (Preface, xi), when writing of storytelling as it relates to physical illness. Yet, the physical and the mental are intertwined and what is true in dealing with physical illness can also be true in dealing with psychological pain. Frank continues, saying that the wounded storyteller "is a moral witness, reenchanting a disenchanted world."

Frank sees storytelling as a moral imperative:

> Storytelling is *for* an other just as much as it is for oneself. It is the reciprocity that is storytelling, the teller offers herself as guide to the other's self-formation. The other's receipt of that guidance not only recognizes but *values* the teller. The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story *for* the other. (pp. 17–18).

Frank categorizes stories into restitution, chaos, and quest stories. The restitution story, a return to full health, is the one preferred by the medical establishment, and is the most societally acceptable. Yet Frank feels that this is not necessarily the type of story that fits many illnesses, and that the illness as quest narrative is more often more useful, especially for chronic or terminal illness. The chaos story is not really a story at all as it follows no coherent narrative, but it is an expression of what is happening to a person in the midst of a crisis. Yet Frank believes this type of story is worthy of witness, even so. Chaos stories, he says, remind us "that some situations cannot be risen above" (p. 135).

The value of storytelling is, therefore, about finding a place for both storyteller and listener; it is the sharing of experience that can often lead to solutions and acceptance.

Before her death in 1992, poet Audre Lorde (1997) advocated an end to silence in *The Cancer Journals*, declaring, "I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior" (p. 19). She chose not to wear a prosthetic breast, although she was actively encouraged to do so by health professionals. To Lorde, the prosthesis is a form of silence that does not allow those who have had the removal of their breasts to find each other and form community. She states that "silence and invisibility go hand in hand with powerlessness" (p. 62). She stresses the importance of telling your story in order to 'remain present' to yourself. Survival and teaching go hand in hand, and telling the story is an important part of both.

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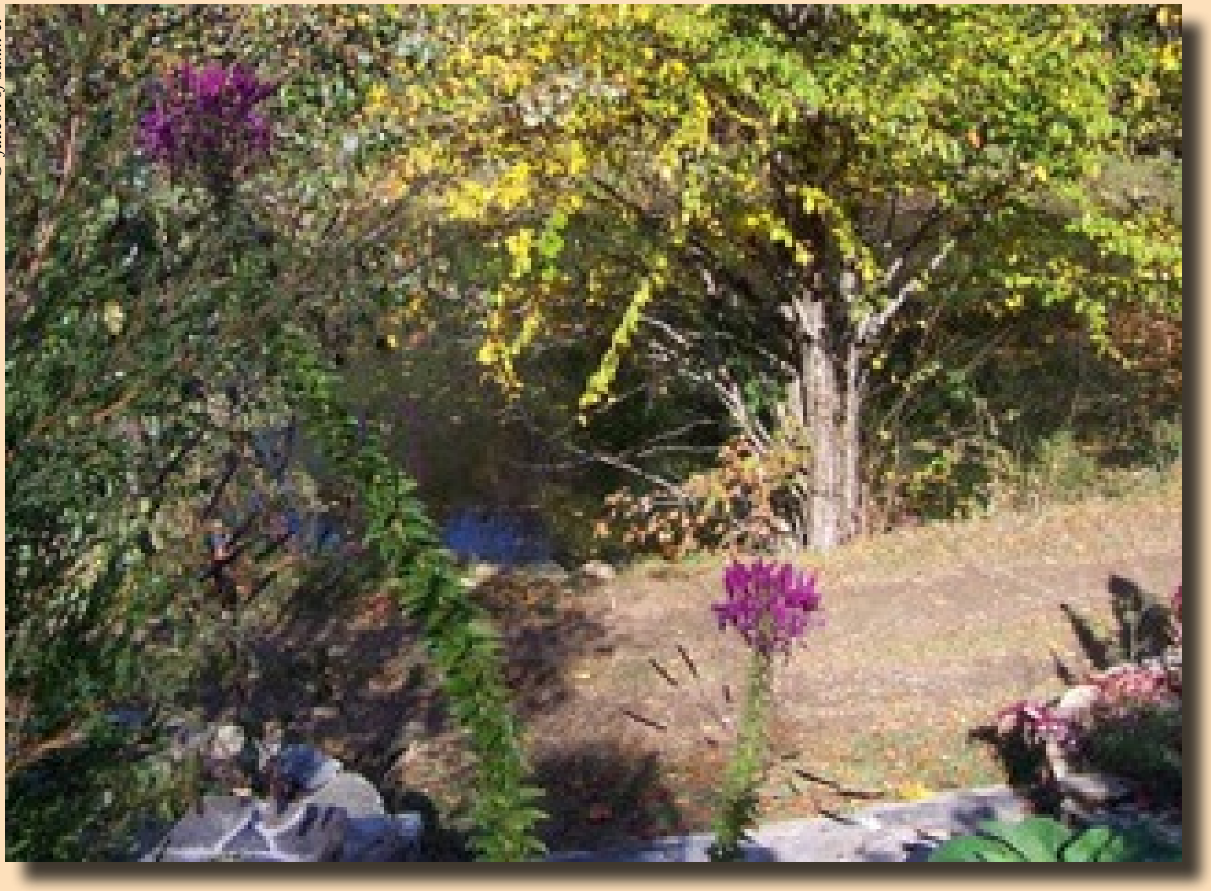
BARDIC APPROACH TO MENTAL BALANCE

BY FAUCON OF SAKIN'EL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I have heard of Earth an ancient call
unto Mind and Heart and Spirit all,
that only two of these four may join
at once in balanced view of life's pain.
Yet, each bound Element of Being
must have its moment of knowing,
that mem'ries, values, and character
blend amalgam of what may matter.

Of this I wander through murm'ring
wood
to embrace the marriage as I should
of twenty-four views of things unknown,
found each to all in faire proportion.

I notice the brook beguiling there,
Mindful to offer a Goddess prayer
for Earth's cycling of misted tears,
filtered by sands of toils and fears.

I whistle a tune of Heartfelt joy
to call hidden Spirit forth to play,
that song and shadow might now reveal
the texture of soul ephemeral.

and all of you, dear friends
can verse the rest
in silent journey
as ye may.

DRINKING WITH THE ANCESTORS

BY DEAN EASTON

This poem ain’t no teetotal ritual:
let’s raise each cup, now, individual,
every mug and glass fill up now
and start drinking with the Ancestors.

Chat ‘em up — don’t merely greet ‘em;
the Dead are chummy when you meet ‘em.
This good liquor in your tummy
gets you thinking: toast the Ancestors!

By and with the spirits near us —
“Don’t invoke us if you fear us” —
good advice, if we lose focus,
glasses clinking with the Ancestors.

A few more rounds, more pints and glasses,
may find us falling on our asses.
We strive to heed old voices calling
though we’re blinking at the Ancestors.

Yes, when morning comes, perhaps uncertain
if we dreamed or drew some curtain
on a world where it truly seemed
that we were linking with our Ancestors,

good liquor works its own true magic,
so never blame it — downright tragic,
if “hung over” is what we name it:
feel like sinking toward the Ancestors?

They come in all shapes, and in all sizes:
some are heroes, some no prizes
(they’re like us in all our guises)
familiar patterns — star or rose
tattoos we’re inking for the Ancestors.

Listen: they are singing, they are cussing,
they can advise us if we're sussing
out the paths our lives might take
or leave shivers in their wake
that have us shrinking from our Ancestors.

Before a soul decides to curse them,
mutter charms that will disperse them
foil their harms and then reverse them,
all these stinking, damned Ancestors!

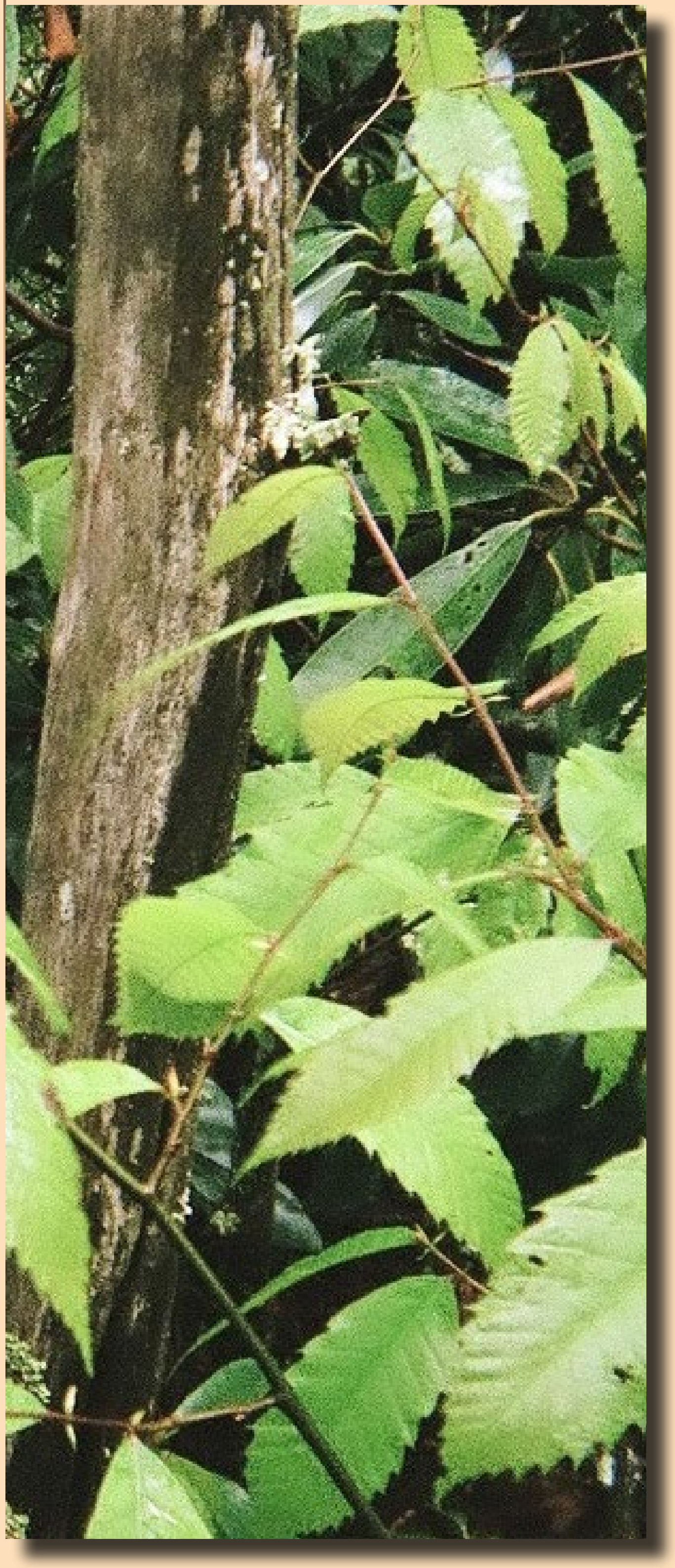
(Ah, do please remember …)

we're their consequence, not moot —
we got their genetic seed and root,
and we're the payoff, crown and fruit,
we're their future, "built to suit,"
so cheers to drinking with our Ancestors!

Dean is an Ovate in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids, learning the land in the Southern Vermont Hills where he also blogs, conlangs, and teaches high school English.

THE KING IN EXILE

BY BUCK MARCHINTON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I am a Chestnut. My ilk were kings,
ruling the slopes, for summers beyond counting,
from summit stronghold to sunlit valley.
Then ignorant man – lamentable fool –
loosed a plague, a lethal blight
that swept o'er our realm like raging wildfire,
strangled our trunks, toppling snags,
leaving our bones to bleach on the slopes.

Our mountain kingdom, claimed by our cousins,
the oak and the ash, the elm and the birch,
is green again. Forgotten are we,
but we remember, and make for the sky,
defying disease, the doom of our kind.
From roots yet quickened, we rear skyward,
stealing the sunshine, the solar tithing
that was our due, in days gone by.

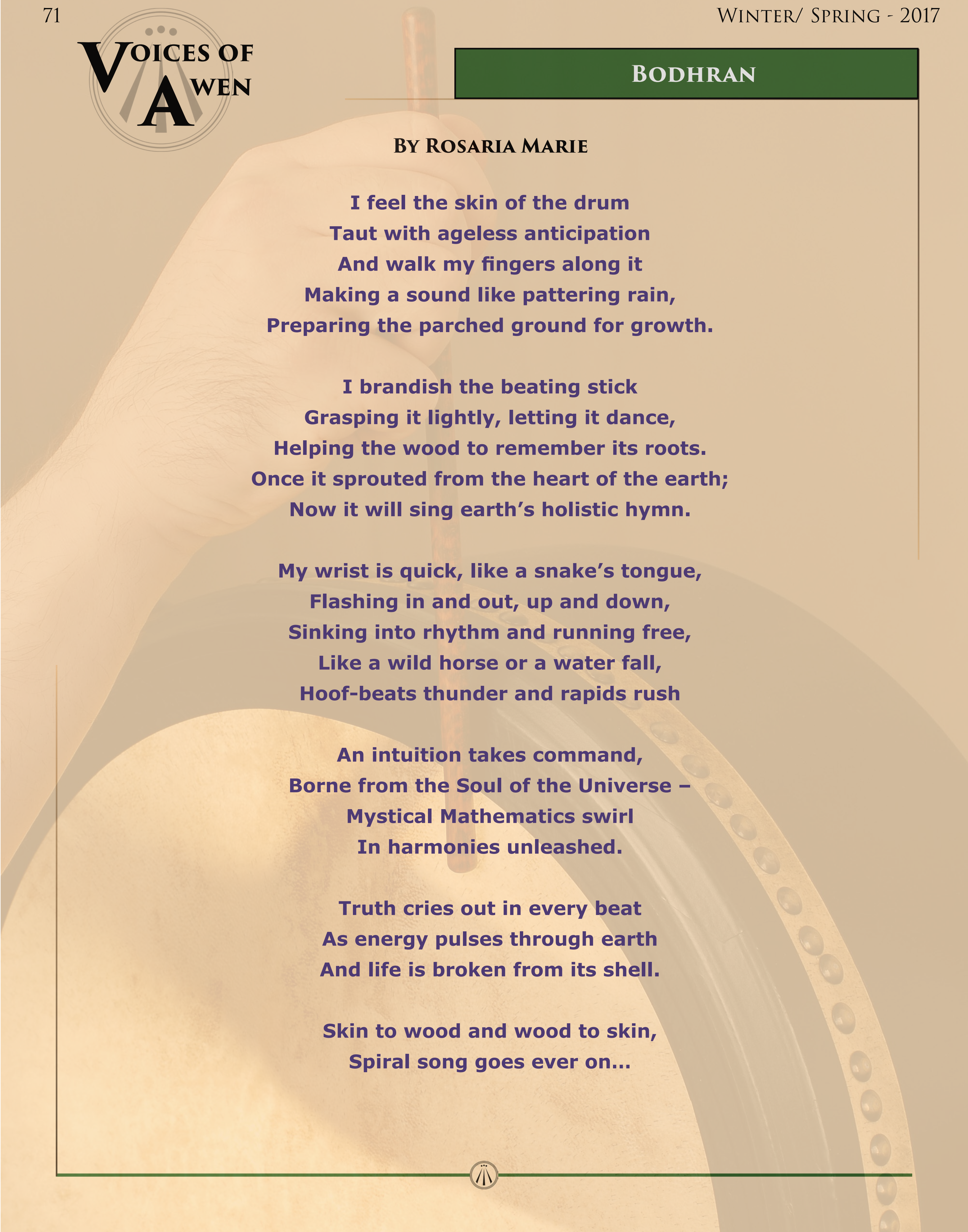
Then sickness returns, scything young trunks.
We sleep for a winter, then gather our strength
for spring's rebirth, the season of hope.
We rise yet again, an echo of greatness,
throw shade o'er our bones, til blight strikes again.

Though often I fall, fail will I never.
So long as there's soil to steady my roots,
and thirst-quenching rain, I'll rise yet again.
For I am the Chestnut, and my ilk are kings.

Buck Marchinton is a wildlife biologist in the Bardic grade of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids.

BODHRAN

BY ROSARIA MARIE



I feel the skin of the drum
Taut with ageless anticipation
And walk my fingers along it
Making a sound like pattering rain,
Preparing the parched ground for growth.

I brandish the beating stick
Grasping it lightly, letting it dance,
Helping the wood to remember its roots.
Once it sprouted from the heart of the earth;
Now it will sing earth's holistic hymn.

My wrist is quick, like a snake's tongue,
Flashing in and out, up and down,
Sinking into rhythm and running free,
Like a wild horse or a water fall,
Hoof-beats thunder and rapids rush

An intuition takes command,
Borne from the Soul of the Universe –
Mystical Mathematics swirl
In harmonies unleashed.

Truth cries out in every beat
As energy pulses through earth
And life is broken from its shell.

Skin to wood and wood to skin,
Spiral song goes ever on...

It mirrors every story told,
A reflection of some deeper plain.
It forms a well-worn path,
The constancy a comfort.

Then hear the click of wood on wood –
The common elements are wed!
A passion punctuates the lay
With changing force that brings new life

I rest my head against the frame,
A circle, like eternity.
Oak wisdom vibrates off its curves,
Long since imbued by Ancient Magic
And Magic's Source, Who Is What Is

Though distance stretches long,
Nearness hums within…

Some echo of the ocean waves,
Of lion's heart, of humming bird's wings,
The essence of the surge of life,
Each spark of flame and drop of blood,
So strong it flows, the pulsing tide…

And yet, hear now:

The gentle beat of Mother's Love,
The cradle of life's dawn
So intimate a lullaby,
So magical a drum
Encapsulates the meaning
Of all that Is and Is to Come

Avellina Balestri (aka Rosaria Marie) is a freelance writer whose musings on matters of world history, popular culture, current events, and universal spirituality have been featured in over 25 magazines. She is also the editor-in-chief of The Fellowship of The King, an online magazine exploring the arts through a spiritual lens.

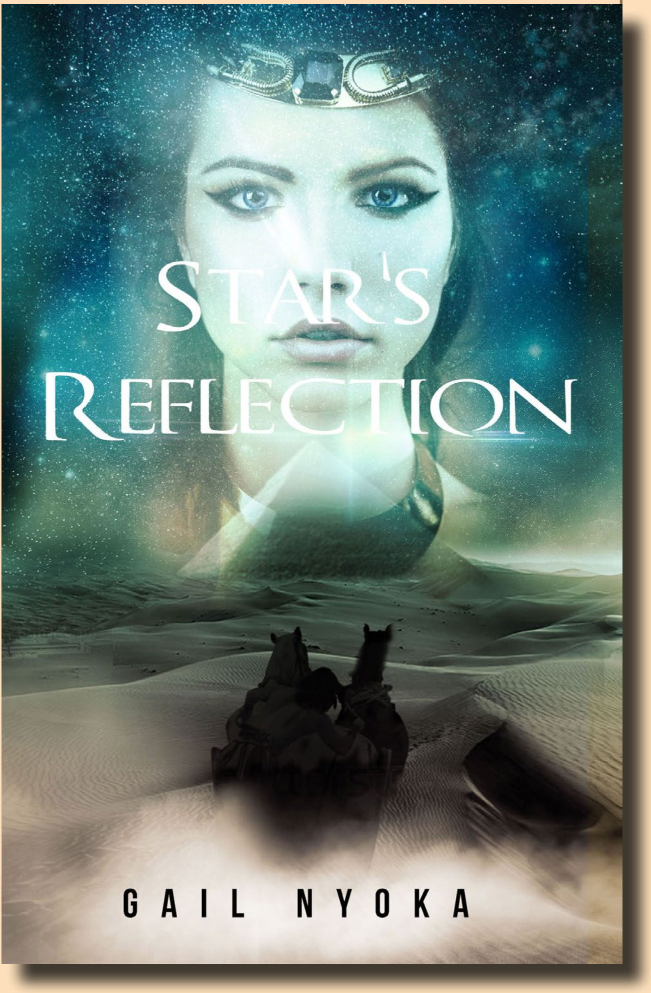
STAR'S REFLECTION

BY GAIL NYOKA

EVEN in ancient times, the magic that made the mirror had been a mystery. The mirror is handed to the chosen successor of each High Priestess of the temple of Het Heru.

In *Star's Reflection* (2016), my new novel, two Toronto schoolgirls are pulled into the world of an ancient Egyptian temple to Het Heru (Hathor). On both sides of the mirror, there is danger. *An excerpt*:

> I have the spacey feeling of being in the mirror, but I feel that I am walking in a courtyard at sunset; the sun sinking into red in front of me. Under my feet is hard-packed earth. I can feel it warm on my bare soles. I am walking towards a low, flat-roofed stone building which has a wide door. As I draw nearer, I see that there is a vulture carved into the stone above the door. Its wings are outstretched. The vulture is painted in vivid blues, and muted yellows and browns. I feel the earth under my feet turn to flagstones, cool as I walk. I am walking purposefully towards that doorway. The door is very big with a large gold ring as a handle. As I approach, a man steps in front of the door. No. Not a man, exactly. He is wearing a kilt, like the one I'd seen on the priest, Horeb, in the mirror. But this man has the head of a jackal. He folds his arms over his chest, blocking my way. His fierce black eyes dare me to come closer. (pp. 44-45)



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From Marsha Stonehouse's review: *"Just finished reading it and loved it. Romance, intrigue, magic, ancient and modern settings. Definitely recommend it!"*

Nyoka, G. (2016). Star's reflection. New York, NY: Vanguard Press

Watch the trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImFIE3pJFT8
Available from Amazon and Barnes & Noble

CHESTER AND THE HUMMINGBIRD FAIR

BY M.F. HARDING

Chester was White. I know what you're thinking. That is an awful way to start a story. Most days I would agree, but not today. Chester *was* White, and for Chester, that was a bad thing. You see, Chester was a Raccoon.

Once, a passing Fox called Chester a 'Moon Dog.' No one was ever sure if that was an insult or not. Chester didn't react to it one way or the other. All Chester knew was that he was white, he was a Raccoon, and none of the girl Raccoons would have anything to do with him.

As time passed, nothing seemed quite right. The grubs he hunted began to lose their appeal. The crayfish he snagged off the bottom of Colton Creek were too crunchy. The sweet roots he dug up were not so sweet. Even the blue of the sky was watery and pale-looking. Chester was very sad. Chester was always alone. Chester was White.

Now this might have been the end of our story had it not been for a curious series of events. While hunting for grubs, crayfish, and sweet roots, he happened upon two very strange looking creatures. One was a Man. The man sat quietly against the trunk of an ancient Red Cedar tree. He wore a green shirt, a pair of dark pants, and a wide-brimmed hat with a Blue Jay feather stuck in the brim. The hat was pulled down over his eyes and he appeared to be fast asleep. The other was a Hummingbird. He also perched quietly on the top of the man's hat drinking a liquid out of a tiny battered tin cup. The bird wore a hat of his own. It was a dark grey tam set at a jaunty angle. Chester blinked at this unusual sight. That's when it happened.

The Hummingbird suddenly flew

straight up into the air.

"TICK! TICK-TICK. T-TICK-TICK," exclaimed the Hummingbird in alarm. He vanished up into the branches of the cedar tree. Hummingbirds are very fast creatures. They fly fast, they eat fast, and they talk fast. They can disappear faster than Fairies can. In fact, each TICK was a complete hummingbird sentence. You have to listen very carefully if you are going to understand what a Hummingbird is saying. The man did not move, but his slow musical voice filled the tiny clearing.

"There is no such thing… as a Moon Dog, Leon."

"Yea there is, Frederick," Leon contradicted. "Oi can see him right there." Leon flew directly at Chester then veered away at high speed.

"It's a Moon Dog all right, an' that's a fact, or Oi'll eat me own tail feathers, Oi will." Leon was from somewhere called England. No one knew where that was, but it did explain why everybody, except Leon of course, talked funny.

The man lifted his head and looked at Chester. He had blue eyes and white eyebrows.

"Hello there," he called to Chester. He spoke perfect Raccoon.

"Hello," said Chester.

"Perhaps you can help me settle a small argument with Leon here. Are you a Moon Dog?"

"I… I don't think so," said Chester. Although, a Fox once confused me with one."

"There, you see Leon, he is not a Moon Dog."

"What is he then?" Leon flew back and looked closely at Chester. "Are you sure you are not a Moon Dog?"

"Pretty sure, yes," answered Chester.

"What are you then?"

"I am a Raccoon."

"You're not a Raccoon!" exclaimed Leon. "You're White."

"LEON! That is no way to speak to our guest." Frederick was frowning. He was also speaking to empty air. Leon had vanished back into the tree branches above.

"Is he dangerous?" Leon called down from above.

"No, he is not dangerous," Frederick answered. "You're *not*, are you?"

Chester shook his head.

"See. Do you have a name?"

"I'm Chester."

"It is very nice to meet you Chester," said Frederick.

"How do you do? I have not seen a Man before."

"Oi! He's not a Man. Frederick is the Earth Pilgrim," Leon announced. He settled back down on Frederick's hat and began to drink again from the tiny tin cup.

"A White Raccoon. That *is* a rare sight to be sure," said Frederick. "Looking at you, I am reminded of something. I just cannot remember what it is. Not to worry, it will come to me.”

“Is he coming to the Fair?” asked Leon.

“Leon, you know the rules. You have to invite him first,” Frederick pointed out.

“Oh yea, that’s right, Oi do.”

Chester’s pink ears perked up. “There’s a Fair?” he asked.

“Have you never heard of the Hummingbird Fair?” asked Leon. Chester shook his head.

“It is called the ‘Hummingbird Fair’ because only a Hummingbird can invite you,” said Frederick. “You see the Fair is magical. If you are invited it is easy to find. If you have not been invited, you will never find it. It is all run by the Fairy Folk.”

Leon flew over to Chester and stopped a mere whisker away. He bowed to Chester with a sweep of his tam.

“Chester the White Raccoon,” Leon began formally. “It is my honour and privilege to invite you to the ‘Hummingbird Fair.’”

There was a sudden and noticeable change in the small clearing around Chester. The air smelled fresher and sweeter. Colours were brighter and even the broad, fringed, scented cedar branches looked more defined – smelled more aromatic. Every feather on Leon was glowing.

“Thank you, Leon. I would be delighted to attend,” said Chester. “I have never been invited to anything before.” His whiskers trembled with excitement.

“It is high time

© Whitney Mortensen

indeed," Leon remarked.

"Well then, I suppose it is time to get going. The Fair won't wait for us," said Frederick.

The Earth Pilgrim stood. To Chester, he was impossibly tall. In the world of men, however, he would have been looked upon as somewhat short and a bit round in the vestibule. The crown of his hat actually brushed the lower branches of the Cedar tree. He turned and strode off into the depths of the forest with long loping strides. Chester hurried after him.

It was never clear to Chester afterward if they walked for a very long way, or a very short way. Everything felt fresh and new. One thing he *was* sure of was that for the first time in his life, he was happy.

Then he thought he began to hear music. It was faint and far away, but as he got closer the music grew louder. He could begin to see shapes, colours, and movement through the low underbrush. Suddenly he stepped into a sun-dappled meadow filled with wild flowers.

They were stopped by a magnificently dressed little man not much taller that Chester. There was white lace at his neck and cuffs and he wore a bright red shirt with a simple leather vest. His pants were bright green and they came down to just below the knee. Below that were white stockings and black shoes with a silver buckle on each. His belt was also silver and covered in tiny bells that tinkled sweetly every time he moved. Even his fine, white hair, that lifted in a halo about his head, was not the most interesting feature of this tiny man. What captured Chester's attention and held it were the man's beautiful transparent butterfly wings.

This was a real Fairy!

The Fairy lifted into the air until he was face to face with the man.

"Frederick! You're late!" he accused. He poked Frederick in the nose.

Frederick's face darkened. His frown grew deeper and more dangerous. It was like a thunderstorm was building and racing towards the cheery meadow.

"Albrecht Fafnir Puck! An Earth Pilgrim is never late. Nor is…"

"Yes, yes, yes, I know. Nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to. I read that book too."

"Oh well, it was worth a try," said Frederick sheepishly. Another Fairy landed on the forward brim of his hat. He bent way over to look under the brim at Frederick.

"Frederick, you're late. Everybody has been asking about you."

"I am here now." There was a pause while the newcomer looked over at Albrecht. "Umm, yes, we know, Frederick. We can see you." Fairies were very literal creatures and they never understood the need to state the obvious.

"I would like to introduce our newest companion…" Frederick began again.

"Yes, we know. Hello Chester, and

welcome to the Hummingbird Fair. Today is your day. Look around and enjoy yourself."

"Wait a minute, you know my name?" asked Chester.

"Of course we do. You're on the guest list." Albrecht gestured, and a shimmering parchment magically appeared out of thin air. It was covered with curious marks."

"Oh," said Chester dubiously. The parchment faded away.

Albrecht suddenly turned and pointed at Leon. "You! You behave yourself this year. I will be keeping my eyes on you."

"Me?" Leon looked hurt. "What did I do?"

"Hrumph!" Was all Albrecht said. The Fairies flew off.

Leon was about to say something when Frederick held up a finger. "Leave it alone Leon."

Chester was fascinated by all the colours, sights, and sounds. The music he heard earlier was very clear now. That would be his first stop, so he followed his ears.

He came across a small wooden box set so that one flat side rose above the grass. On it were three Junebugs, with high black shells, playing instruments. Behind them was a grasshopper banging away on tiny drums. On the big drum was written two words: The Beetles. They were singing one of their classics. Once they were finished with their last refrains of 'Ya Ya Ya,' one of the Beetles looked up.

"Good to see you, Frederick. I see you brought Leon with you again."

"Yes, I did John, we are on a mission of sorts. This is Chester, the White Raccoon."

"Nice to meet you Chester. Meet me band mates, Paul, George, and ummm. Oi, what was your name again?" The drummer looked up past a prominent nose.

"Emmett," said the grasshopper.

"Yea, that's right, Emmett. Hmmm… John, Paul, George, and Emmett?" John shook his head sadly.

"What happened to Ringo, your regular drummer?" asked Frederick.

"Dunno," admitted John as he adjusted his round wire-rimmed glasses, "Couldn't make it. He says he caught some kind of a bug – he did." Leon snorted suddenly and started to giggle.

"Find that funny do you Leon? Ringo's sick, and you're laughing. He probably caught sommat from a hummingbird," said John, somewhat annoyed.

"Yea. Oh come on, you have to admit that's a bit funny. I mean you're beetles, and Ringo says he caught a bug? Don't you get it?" Leon tried to resurrect the joke.

The four band members looked at Leon in stony silence.

"Yea, right then. Hey Chester," Paul said with a wink, "We've got just the song for you, mate."

Emmett got the beat going with his drum sticks and they launched into "I Saw Her Standing There." Chester sat on his haunches to listen. A small crowd of Ladybugs began to arrive and they all screamed in their high-pitched voices. They shook their heads back and forth and waved their antenna. It was all very curious.

That's when something distracted Chester. Something pale was moving through the trees at the far end of the fairground. As quickly as it appeared it was gone. Chester waved at the band and they smiled in reply. He headed in that direction. It took him towards the middle of the fairgrounds.

"I still think that was funny," Leon pouted.

"We know you do Leon," said Frederick in a soothing voice.

The trio nearly stumbled onto the track where the Snail races were underway. Chester looked at the contestants carefully, but even after a long time, it was difficult to tell if any of them were actually moving or not. They each had a number painted on their shells. That number was 47. The snail who painted these numbers obviously didn't realize there were rules associated with his task. He later claimed he had simply picked number 47 at random. As it turned out, it worked out just fine. When the winner, number 47, was announced, each snail happily claimed victory. Snails were very vain. Nobody knew why. But then, nobody but the other snails really cared.

It happened again. Chester saw a flash of white just out of the corner of his eye, but once again when he turned to look, it was gone. He could have sworn it was the flick of a fuzzy tail.

Next, there was a large wheel powered by a Hamster. Small baskets made from woven grass were attached to the outside of the wheel. Each basket contained a baby Mouse. The wheel whizzed around. When it stopped, the baby mice crawled out of the baskets and were very dizzy. They wobbled away unsteadily as the next group of baby Mice in the queue scrambled to get into the baskets.

Leon flew off Frederick's hat and hovered above the wheel.

"Ello Ferris," Leon called down to the Hamster.

"Hello Leon," Ferris called back. "Have you tried the honey scones yet?"

"We're heading there right now, Ferris. Are they good?"

"Best ever, Leon. Those Bees really know their honey scones."

Leon waved and flew back to Frederick's hat. He dipped his bill back into the tin cup. Ferris started up the wheel again and soon the tiny Mice where whirling around at an alarming speed.

Chester asked. "Hey Leon, what is that in your cup?" Leon looked down at Frederick. Frederick looked up at Leon.

"Mead," Leon said.

"What's mead?"

"Sweet," replied Leon, noncommittally.

Presently, an odd sound could be heard. A large swarm of bees were buzzing busily. They were making honey scones. Frederick, Leon, and Chester stopped. They all watched the bees work. There was a large plate piled high with dripping honey scones; although, how they were being made was a bit of a mystery.

Frederick drew a long pipe from his jacket and brought it up to his lips. He sucked on it for a moment and slowly it began to smoke. He bent to blow some of the smoke into the swarm of bees. Most quieted down a bit and many landed in the grass. Frederick selected two scones from the pile and replaced them with a small, flat jar of honey. One scone he set on the brim of his hat. Leon hovered over the scone and licked it with his long tongue. The other he handed to Chester.

The Raccoon looked around for a moment and found there was a shallow bowl of water sitting next to the scones. He took his scone and dunked it in the water rolling it over and over with his paws.

"Chester? What are you doing washing the scone," Leon asked.

Chester looked up somewhat confused. "Washing it? I am not washing it. I am feeling it with my paws. I am tasting it before I eat it. My paws need to be wet for me to be able to do that."

"No kidding?" Leon exclaimed.

"That is quite true Leon, said Frederick. "It is a common misconception that Raccoons wash their food. They don't. Their paws are more sensitive when they are wet. They wet them to tell them what is food and what is not. Saves a lot of time too, if you ask me."

Leon flew down to stare Frederick right in the eye. "You're a human, not a Raccoon. How is it you know this so exactly?"

"I know because I am an Earth Pilgrim, Leon. You're a Hummingbird. How is it that you did not?" Leon folded his wings in avian indignation. The moment he did, he fell like a stone onto the ground. Luckily, he landed in soft grass. Unluckily, he landed on a bee. It stung him on his backside.

"OWWWWW!" exclaimed Leon.

"OWWWWW, yourself!" exclaimed the bee.

"You stung me!"

"You landed on me."

"LEON!" Leon turned rubbing his backside. It was none other than the Fairy, Albrecht Fafnir Puck. He was shaking his head. "Tsk tsk tsk! I told you I would be keeping an eye on you."

"Are you causing trouble again?" asked Albrecht.

"No, I am not causing trouble again." he stated indignantly.

Albrecht turned to the bee. "Why did you sting the Hummingbird?"

"He sat on me."

Albrecht turned to Frederick. "I told you Hummingbirds were trouble. I told you we should have had a Water Buffalo Fair, instead."

"Now calm yourself, Albrecht, Leon is a bit impulsive perhaps, but he means well. Besides, imagine what cleaning up after Water Buffalo would be like."

"Sigh. I suppose you're right, as always, Frederick. Just see to it he behaves himself, would you? This is all so tiring."

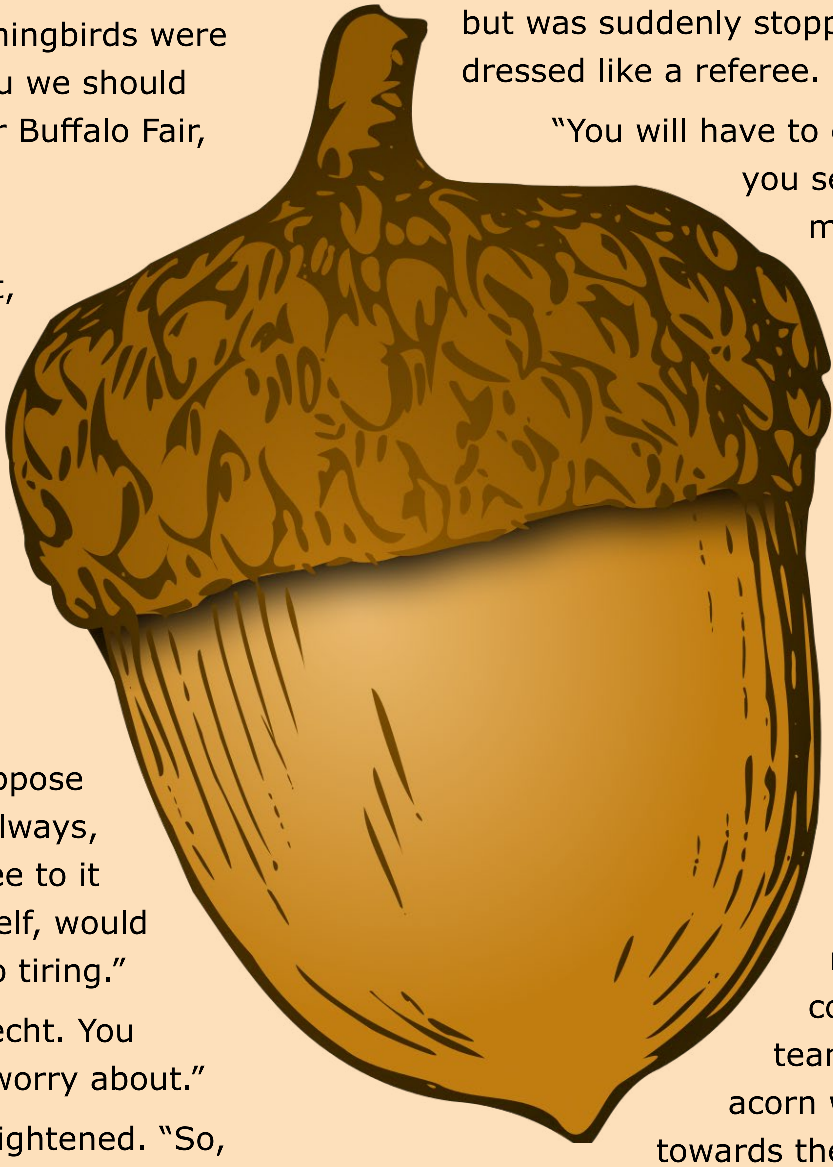
"I will Albrecht. You have nothing to worry about."

Albrecht brightened. "So, Chester, are you enjoying yourself?" Albrecht looked around. Leon looked around. Frederick looked around. Chester was no longer there. He was walking towards the far end of the fairground.

"Chester!" Leon called.

"Let him go Leon. This is why we are here, after all. Just watch."

While the three were arguing, Chester saw that odd white flash again. This time it was on the far side of the fairgrounds. He was becoming very curious now. He walked toward it. He was about to cross a soccer (football) pitch, but was suddenly stopped by a Marmot dressed like a referee.



"You will have to go around. Can't you see there is a match underway?" Chester refocused his attention on the game.

It was a championship match between the Red Squirrels and the Grey Squirrels. A Marmot was the referee and he had a small whistle in his mouth. The game consisted of each team trying to roll an acorn with their noses towards the opponents' goal. It was a fast-paced game until the acorn suddenly vanished.

'Tweeeeeeet!' The Marmot blew his whistle and held up a paw. All the Squirrels stopped, sat up on their haunches, then turned towards the Referee. The Marmot hurried over to the site of the infraction.

"Delay of game!" he announced in a loud voice. All the players looked at each other accusingly. The Marmot struck a pose in front of one of the Red Squirrels.

"Alright Edwin, spit it out!"

Edwin looked around innocently.

"EDWIN, spit it out!" the ref demanded again.

Edwin shook his head no.

"EDWIN McMONIGAL SQUEAKTAIL, I said spit it out!"

Ptui

He spit the acorn out of his cheek pouch. He looked positively astonished at its sudden appearance. His tail twitched, he put his paws up against his cheeks in mock surprise, and let out a short 'squeak.' The other Squirrels groaned and turned away.

"What have I told you about eating the ball?"

Edwin shrugged his shoulders and his brow furrowed in thought. His eyes and nose twitched. He scratched his head. He thought and he thought. He had nothing.

"Don't!" the Marmot reminded him.

"Don't what?" asked Edwin.

"Don't eat the ball."

"What, me? Eat the ball? Don't be daft." Edwin turned and walked away. "I have never heard of such rot," he mumbled. "Eat the ball indeed. What do you think I am?"

The Marmot blew the whistle and yelled, "Grey Ball!" The game resumed in the blink of an eye.

Chester began to walk around the pitch and saw the flash of white again. Now he could see a nose, whiskers, and a pair of black eyes peering at him from under a log. He walked toward them. In the background, he heard another whistle.

"Edwin!"

"What?"

"For pity's sake, spit it out!"

"What?" Chester had stopped listening.

Chester stopped at the log and peeked under it. Sure enough, a small furry face peeked back at him. He hopped over the log and could not believe his eyes. It was a pure White Raccoon, just like him. This was the only other White Raccoon he had ever seen. It had small ears, a delicate inquisitive nose, and long eyelashes.

She was a girl Raccoon.

"Hello," she said with a sweet Raccoon smile.

"Ummm, hello?" Chester replied. He suddenly felt very shy and clumsy.

She smiled at him again. "I am Feather; Fea for short. What's your name?"

"I'm Chester." His heart leapt with joy.

"Nice to meet you Chester. Where did you come from?"

"Oh, I was at the Fair."

Fea looked around. "Fair? What fair?"

"That one over there…" He turned and motioned past the log. Fea stepped up and looked over the log. Chester joined her. He blinked twice. He found he was staring at a large open field of tall grass. It was quite empty. Gone were the Squirrels playing soccer, the Bees and their honey scones, Ferris and his wheel; even the band with John, Paul, George, and Emmett was gone.

His new friends were also gone. Leon the hummingbird, Albrecht Fafnir Puck the fairy, and Frederick the Earth Pilgrim were gone—gone, as though they had never been there at all.

"A moment ago, there was…" Fea was looking at him with her beautiful eyes. Her nose wrinkled with joy just being near him.

"Would you like to see my little creek? It is full of the sweetest crayfish you have ever tasted and the huckleberries are so ripe and sweet. Let me show you. Come on Chester, follow me."

And follow her he did. She was wonderful.

It did not take long for Chester to forget about the Hummingbird Fair. The memory of Leon and Frederick also faded. That was as it should be, too. Chester and Fea started a family of their own. They lived in a cosy hollow tree. They had many little raccoons and some of them were even white.

Chester never thought of himself as White again. He was just a Raccoon. Chester was never alone again either. Fea was always by his side. When Fea looked at him, she always smiled. Chester was finally happy. He was happy like he had never been before in his whole life. He was happy for the rest of his days.

So, if anyone you know is sad or feels left out, or alone, just remember Chester, Leon, Frederick, and of course Fea. Somewhere out there, there is a Hummingbird Fair for each and every one of us. We just have to be patient. The Fair will find us when we need one the most.

M.F. Harding is a practicing Druid, and for the past five years his pilgrimage has brought him to Campbell River, B.C. For the last 27 years, he has made a detailed study of the Coastal Rainforests of Western Canada and Vancouver Island. He lives there with his wife Barbara.

SONGS OF THE GUSARI: BIRTH CIRCLE

BY FAUCON OF SAKIN'EL

Chant
Seek refuge from the seven Beasts.
Gather moonbeams within your heart.
At distance by three filled circle,
Toss a stone and search in about.

Endeavor ever small the great,
And practice ignore shadow tall.
Find instead entwined timeless kiss
Of dragon fly and thistle down.

The young shaman repeated the words of his Grandfather again and again, but still did not understand. With departing breath, the seer had given a final gift—or so he said—"the secret to your inner peace." Kiyan had no peace now, only niggling dread and sleepless nights. A universe of dreams shattered by Tangri Demons; the grumbling skies and flashing eyes gave warning. His spirit was lost.

Yet, in the forbidding land of half-sleep, there creeps visions, some with tiny claws, and others with fairie wings. He leapt to his feet with shaking form and sweated brow. He had seen! He knew! It was as simple as that!

It took a morning to braid the chain of snake grass and rosemary, the length of three of his shadows at sunrise. The stone he selected was of variegated hue with many rills and niche, confused like himself. He did not feel like a shaman as he wandered aimlessly until dusk, but the breeze blown rain seemed to wash more than the dust from his feet. The drizzle stopped and so did he. The stone arched high into the misted air and it took a while to find. With the dawn, the search would begin. For now, sleep.

Kiyan rolled his Lupo cloak that had served as a blanket and ate sparingly of his oat cakes, jerky, and berries. Licking his pouch slaked his thirst, though he could hear a stream gurgling nearby. One end of the grass rope was secured to the stone and leg-spike thrust into the dark earth. A great circle was then defined at the end of the line, three-filled strides around (27), and staked out with twigs and pebbles. Within this domain he would live for three days. His universe folded in.

By fortune or brush of Silver Goddess, his new world touched the edge of the brook. A warm cedar smiled down, but he dared not look up or at its shadow. An unknown berry bush shaded a group of granite boulders. A barren fruit tree rose above its last year crop of fetid mush, uneaten by furry things skittering through the grass. Grass…grass. The rest was grass—and sand—and windfall branches. It could be worse.

Inch by inch, foot by measured foot, Kiyan explored his realm. Each blade of yearning grass a mystery. Each pebble and branch a hiding place for teaming life. Each unearthed nut and seed a promise of life. His nozh blade probed down and through the decay of Fall to find the kiss of Spring.

Father sun was hot on his neck—draw energy from the heavens. The stream provided tinkling laughter to accompany his chuckled blessing over each new treasure found. Myriad curious and friendly birds sang unseen by the youth with nose only inches from the cool upturned earth. Ah, Mother, breathe with me! Insect companions joined in the search, while worms and beetles were set carefully aside. He feared there would not be time to see it all. Feel the tiny roots glide toward the single drop of morning dew. Listen to the clouds teach the new sparrow how to fly. Cry for the flower carelessly crushed by yesterday's foot. Lie still while the dragon wings fan your slumbering brow.

Know that the Great Spirit that made you, made even these.

Know that birth and death are one—and eternal.

Know…

Gone is yesterday with careful nurtured memory.

Prepare for the new day's draw on dream and purpose.

Today…

Dance in the rain. Roll in the blessed earth such that each blade, and stone, and seed and twig presses deep impressions into your naked flesh. Smile as the night mistress sweeps away the scudding clouds to allow the stars to wink in fine applause.

Listen to your spirit laugh—and laugh—and laugh.

© Bruce Lhuillier

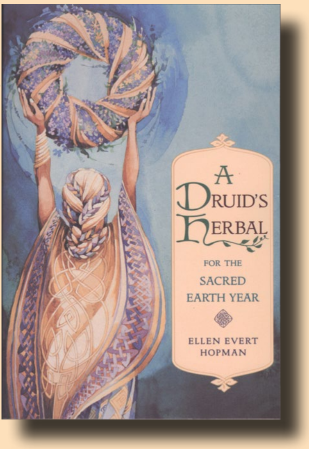
BOOK REVIEW: A DRUID'S HERBAL FOR THE SACRED EARTH YEAR

BY SARAH DISLER

Hopman, E. E. (1995). A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books.

For this issue, I took a look at Ellen Evert Hopman's *A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year*. Hopman is a master herbalist and has been active in multiple Pagan and Druid communities for many years.

Before we get into it, a quick disclaimer: I think we are all (mostly) grown-ups. Yet I still feel obligated to suggest that before you go eating/ drinking/ etc. herbs, talk to a doctor or professional. This book has a lot of great ideas, but it is not an expert on your body.



© Destiny Books

Hopman starts out by giving a brief history of Druidry in general. Her approach to Druidry should be taken with a grain of salt as it seems to speak to a specific path. Druids are a small (but growing!) group to write a book for, and it seems she limited her audience even further by writing this way. For example, she states that Druids always celebrate around sacred trees. I doubt I am alone in celebrating in such places as in my bedroom with my plastic flowers (thank you, Dollar Store) or in my treeless yard.

The book then launches into some basics of how to prepare plant/ tree parts for herbal remedies. This chapter is great for people who are new to using herbs. For experts, it might be a little tedious. What follows are lists of trees, plants, and their uses. They are grouped by seasonal festivals, which is a refreshing departure from the encyclopedia-like format of many other herbal books. That makes this book a little less useful as a straight reference book but in some ways more practical. I rely on some things happening during particular times of the year such as getting a nasty cold every fall. What do you know—there are a bunch of great ideas for just that in the Samhuin section.

For many of the herbs, Hopman addresses both their homeopathic and their magical (some might say spiritual as well) uses. Some days you want to honor your spiritual path, some days you really just want that cough to go away! It was helpful to have both uses in one place. Later on, she groups herbs in yet a different way: according to purposes such as purification, death rites, and rituals of marriage.

Serious herbal experts might not get a lot out of this book. Once I got past the at-times pedantic tone, I was happy to have an herbal reference that also speaks to my spirituality.

Sarah Disler has been in the Bardic Grade in the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids since early 2015. She has a stellar career looking at pictures all day, which required years and years of intense training (not really). Most of her energy goes into animal sound mimicry and chaos management. Some would also call it 'raising toddlers.'

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AROUND THE AMERICAS

ANNOUNCING MID-ATLANTIC GATHERING, U.S. (MAGUS) 2017

BY JASON STIEBER

As the Druid community of North America continues to grow in numbers, spirit, and energy, the need for opportunities to come together has also increased. The gatherings on the East, Gulf, and West coasts have played a vital role in this regard, bringing Druids from diverse backgrounds and ecological niches together to learn from one another, renew our connection to nature, and enjoy Eisteddfod. They have also improved our access to prominent OBOD leaders in the UK and abroad, knitting together an exceptional international family. When registration for ECG and GCG began to fill within days of opening, however, it became clear that demand was outstripping our current capacity.

© Sophia Schultz

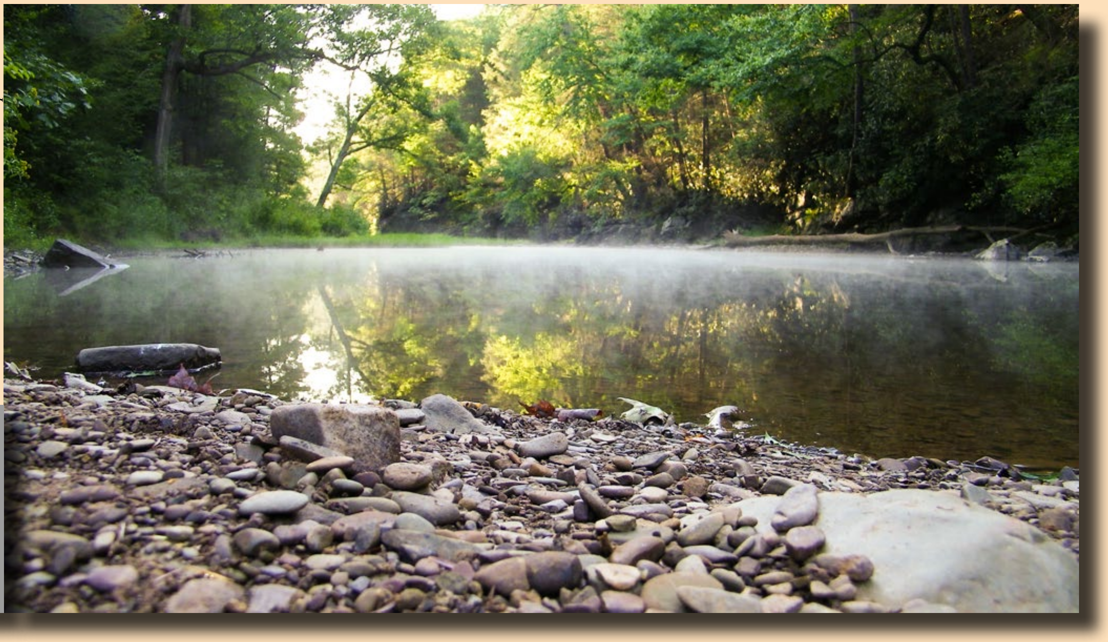
Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary, Artemas, PA

In response to this need, the Northern Virginia Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle is thrilled to announce the first annual Mid-Atlantic Gathering, United States (MAGUS). MAGUS will take place at the enchanted Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary on May 4–7, 2017 near the town of Artemas in southwestern Pennsylvania. With its labyrinth, massive stone circle, and lively Sideling Hill Creek, Four Quarters is the perfect venue for a gathering of Druids. MAGUS co-organizer and Oak and Eagle board member David North said how lucky he feels that Four Quarters said yes to a proposal for the gathering: "We didn't think 4Q, who host large events, would be interested in a gathering of about 80 Druids, but when we submitted our proposal they not only said 'Yes' but 'Hell yes, and where have you been!''

The theme for MAGUS 2017 is "Kindling the Fire," an acknowledgement

MAGUS
OBOD Mid-Atlantic Gathering, U.S.

of the energy of Beltane when the gathering will take place, but also to the foundational work of ECG and GCG organizers. “Dave and I make ECG a centerpiece of our annual calendar, but we know that isn’t possible for everyone,” said Nicole Sussurro, another MAGUS co-founder. “Everything we are doing is standing on the shoulders of these other gatherings. The fire has already been lit. This is the third fire in the eastern United States, the third ray, if you will. We think that’s going to be magical.”


© Sophia Schultz

Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary, Artemas, PA

There will be a lot to do and see at MAGUS. Featured guest Renu Aldrich, editor-in-chief of Druid Magazine, will present a workshop entitled, “Kindling the Spiritual Warrior.” Other presentations include Wanda C’s “Awakening Your Beltane Sensuality,” Dana Driscoll’s “Land Healing on the Inner and Outer Planes,” Dean Easton’s “Kindling Our Sacred Fires,” and DM Editor Barbara Pott’s “Yoga for Druids II—Beltane Style!”

In addition to opening, high, and closing rituals, the organizers are preparing rituals of initiation for any OBOD grade. Tent sites are the primary accommodation available, but Four Quarters does provide access to hot showers and savory meals to keep us on our feet for the duration of the gathering. Limited bunk and double occupancy private rooms are available.

Join us! Slots are already filling up, and registration closes April 12, 2017. Find out more about MAGUS and register for the event at www.oakandeagle.org/midatlanticgathering.

Jason Stieber (aka Ambrose) is a gardener in Washington, D.C. and a co-organizer of the Seed Group of the Oak and Eagle.

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Four Quarters
Interfaith Sanctuary,
Artemas, PA

Burn it like an Eisteddfod Fire: My First OBOD East Coast Gathering

By Loam Ananda

The day before I left for the 2016 (7th Annual) OBOD East Coast Gathering (ECG), I was working on a writing project. And I was stuck. Like, super stuck. Like *I'm going to build a bonfire when I get back and burn everything I have ever attempted to write* stuck. I was nearly 20 hours and two beta readers into a 1,500-word creative nonfiction essay, and I was ready to throw in the towel. My goal had been to finish the blasted thing before leaving for ECG and make the final tweaks after I returned. I wrote until the last minute, giving myself a short half-hour to pack for the ECG. I was totally unprepared, both mentally and logistically, for the gathering. Luckily, I had enough sense to realize it was probably colder in the Pocono Mountains of Northeastern Pennsylvania than it was in Southwestern Ohio.

© Bruce Lhuiller

Author Loam Ananda

With the help of my husband (I am NOT a morning person), I was on the road by 5:45 the next morning. The drive to Camp Netimus from Cincinnati was a solid 10 hours, and I wanted to be there in time for the opening ritual. The long drive gave me time to mentally prepare. I thought about creativity. I thought about community. I thought about music. "Wouldn't it be nice," I thought, "if I could find someone to make music with?" That drive became its own kind of ritual, my thoughts and desires spinning a spell around the weekend.

A couple pit stops and wrong turns made me miss the opening ritual, but I arrived early enough to spend some time getting to know my cabin mates. There were four of us, one a second year "veteran" and the other three attending our first ECG. I had been intentionally grouped with others who were attending on their own and were also relatively new to the gathering. In that first hour, fresh from the road, as I bonded with my cabin mates, I felt the care and attention that camp director Lorraine Soria, the Louisiana Contingent, and all the ECG minions put into this gathering.

After setting up our bunks, my cabin mates and I made our way to the Pavilion to attend the first workshop of the gathering—"The Faeries of Earth, Air, Fire and Water." Gale Park guided us through the large and diverse realm of faerie with the elements as our map and traditional Celtic faerie lore as the medium. We learned about the Gnomes (Earth), the Sylphs (Air), the Salamanders (Fire), and the Undines (Water). Gale's workshop reminded me that we walk the land with the faeries beside us and that elemental faeries can aid us in our mundane and magical work if only we approach them properly. *Maybe*, I thought, *they can help me with my writing*.

That night at dinner—a meal (like all ECG meals) that offered delicious options for omnivores, vegetarians, and vegans alike, something this dairy-intolerant writer is extremely grateful for—I connected even more deeply with my cabin mates. The things I had been thinking about on my drive became topics for conversation. Turns out, I had some soul mates on this OBOD journey.

Then came the announcement: "Don't forget to sign up for tonight's Eisteddfod Competition!" I knew from the ECG web site that this year's formal Eisteddfod would be a friendly competition, that 10 performance slots would be available each night Thursday through Saturday, and that three winners from each round would advance to the final round on Saturday evening. I had thrown my guitar in the car, thinking I might enter, and enter I did.

We gathered at the Friendship Fire Circle just before dusk. If you have never seen a fire built by Derek Batz and Brom Hanks, you are missing works of art—art in the stacking, art in the burning. The Eisteddfod Competition started shortly after the bonfire was lit.

Sitting on the benches, listening to the offerings of my Bardic companions—singing, harp, poetry, storytelling, comedy routines—I felt connected, deeply connected, to this tribe that celebrates the bardic arts. It was cold that night, so cold that my guitar wouldn't tune. But I didn't care. I had already been welcomed by the community with such care and compassion that I was determined to offer my song as a gift, no matter how off-tune it might be.

Remember my drive-time wish that I meet someone to make music with? Well. Be careful what you ask for—the gods are listening! On that very first night, I met Evangeline, another Eisteddfod competitor. She and I both advanced to the final round, and we pledged to sing harmony for each other's final entries.

Merriment and more Bardic "stuff" around the fire commenced following the

Eisteddfod as scheduled. We enjoyed mead from Dragonfire Meadery. We sang. We danced. We cavorted.

That night, as I layered myself in shirts, sweaters, and coat, hat and mittens under my three-season, goose-down mummy sleeping bag and wool blanket, I could see the nearly-full moon climbing the sky from my cabin window. I was ridiculously cold, yes, but I was content—two adjectives that rarely sit next to each other in my life!

© Hex Nottingham

Friday morning, I snatched a quick breakfast before my Bardic Initiation, a special experience that left me feeling, in many ways, reborn and even more deeply connected to the other bardic initiates. Following the initiations, Cindy Bertsch led an elemental ritual for peace.

After lunch, I basked in the sun with my cabin mates, feeling warm for the first time since arriving at camp. We took turns drawing cards from the Druid Plant Oracle. When Selene drew the Nettle card, I told the story of how, years ago, a friend of mine had swatted me with nettles in the woods during a medicinal plant walk, and the phrase *meet me with some nettles in the woods* birthed a silly ditty that I would hone and craft for the final Eisteddfod competition. In the days to follow, all these beautiful bards came out of the woodwork and fed me creative fodder for the Nettle Song.

While we basked in the sun and laughed about nettles, Lorraine gathered children and parents together for an Animal Journey, introducing our younger members to the art of creating a grove and "imagining" an animal companion—an important first step for visualization. Even though my own daughter is grown, I remember how important family and youth workshops were to me when I first began walking a pagan path nearly 20 years ago with a toddler, and I was pleased that ECG welcomed families.

Gabby Roberts led us on a journey through the world of crystals, their properties and uses in her workshop, "The Art of Crystal Jewelry." We learned about the energies of the stones and crystals, and to trust our instincts in choosing stones. *Instinct involves an element of playfulness*, I thought. My ECG experience was presenting me many opportunities for playfulness, and in that playfulness, intuition and creation.

Wrapping up Friday's workshops, and rekindling any energy lost through the day, Hex Nottingham presented his workshop, "Spiritual Drumming." From drum circle etiquette to deep listening, and from dynamics and volume to sending and sensing energies, Hex engaged us with his passionate and inclusive approach to ritual drumming. I had not brought my drums, but I slapped out my rhythm on the Pavilion picnic table. Some people used their chests and legs as drums. Others stomped their feet. Each of us discovered our individual beat and wove it into a polyrhythmic tapestry in an impromptu, ecstatic, drum circle.

After dinner, we gathered around the bonfire—not yet lit—to gaze at the moon and stars and learn the lunatic wisdom of Sarah Fuhro's workshop, "Moon Wisdom." We stood under our Harvest Moon teacher, opening to change, the ebb and flow of tides mirroring that of our emotions. We traced our relationship to the Moon, gathering in groups according to the astrological sign she occupied at our birth, seeking to learn how our moon sign sets the rhythm of our life.

On that second night of Eisteddfod and bonfire, the Mari Lwyd made an appearance. The Mari Lwyd is a Welsh wassailing folk custom, involving a horse's skull mounted on a pole. Our Mari Lwyd, created and presented by Nicole Sussuro, had bright glowing eyes and dancing ribbons for a mane. Nicole told us that the Mari Lwyd would be carried from house to house, requesting entry through a song. The householders were expected to initially deny it entry, again in song, until eventually relenting and inviting the Mari Lwyd inside for food and drink. I imagined creativity, the Awen, was the Mari Lwyd herself, knocking on my door, singing to me. How many times had I turned her away without food or drink? As we attempted to sing the Welsh call and response verses that Nicole taught us, I imagined opening my door wide for the Awen, inviting it to sit down for tea and cake. Maybe a little mead.

That night I felt warmer and slept without my hat and mittens.

Saturday morning, we prepared for the Alban Elfed ritual. After lunch, Cathryn Bauer and Kris Foster armed us with a roll

LISTEN TO THE NETTLE SONG

of white butcher paper and two boxes of marking pens. We created a banner expressing solidarity and support for the Standing Rock protesters, posing for a photograph with the banner to be posted on the Facebook page dedicated to the protest. Some of us attended a "Beekeeping Basics" workshop, led by Todd Bertsch and Jim Hutchings. This covered the beginning steps for becoming a beekeeper, hive types, the colony and its organization, and beekeeping equipment. Todd and Jim shared how to get started keeping bees as well as how to manage the colony.

Evangeline and I met in the woods to practice our "set" for the final Eisteddfod competition. I expressed concern that my Nettle Song was unfinished, and she encouraged me to share it as it was. Everywhere I turned, I was reminded that things don't have to be perfect or finished to be shared. I was reminded to play—and enjoy the playing. I was reminded that community is an important catalyst for my creative process. The gods said, "Are you getting this, Loam? Are you taking this down? This is your lesson. Will you remember?"

By the time we gathered for Alban Elfed, the main ritual of the weekend, I was totally enamored with this community. The gifts we prepared in the morning were presented in ritual by the guests, families, children, Bards, Ovates, and Druids, each one beautifully rendered. I was touched by the sacred esteem with which we held our guests. Here, in this space, they were not merely spectators; they were vital threads woven into the fabric of our weekend tapestry. Again, I thought of the Mari Lwyd, the Awen, the sacred guest. Would I make creativity my Sacred Guest when I returned home?

That night, as I approached the fire, I heard someone say, "Loam is here," and then, right there before my very ears, 100 or so Druids burst into a chorus of *Happy Birthday*—Druids from Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana. Druids from New Hampshire, New York, and New Jersey. Druids from Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. From North Carolina, Virginia, and California. From Vermont, from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. And from Canada and Greece. As an adopted person, my birthday is usually a tough time of year for me. Now I have another "birth" day—my Bardic Initiation—and the deep connection I felt with my Druid family. "Soooo…we're going to do this every year on my birthday, right?" I joked.

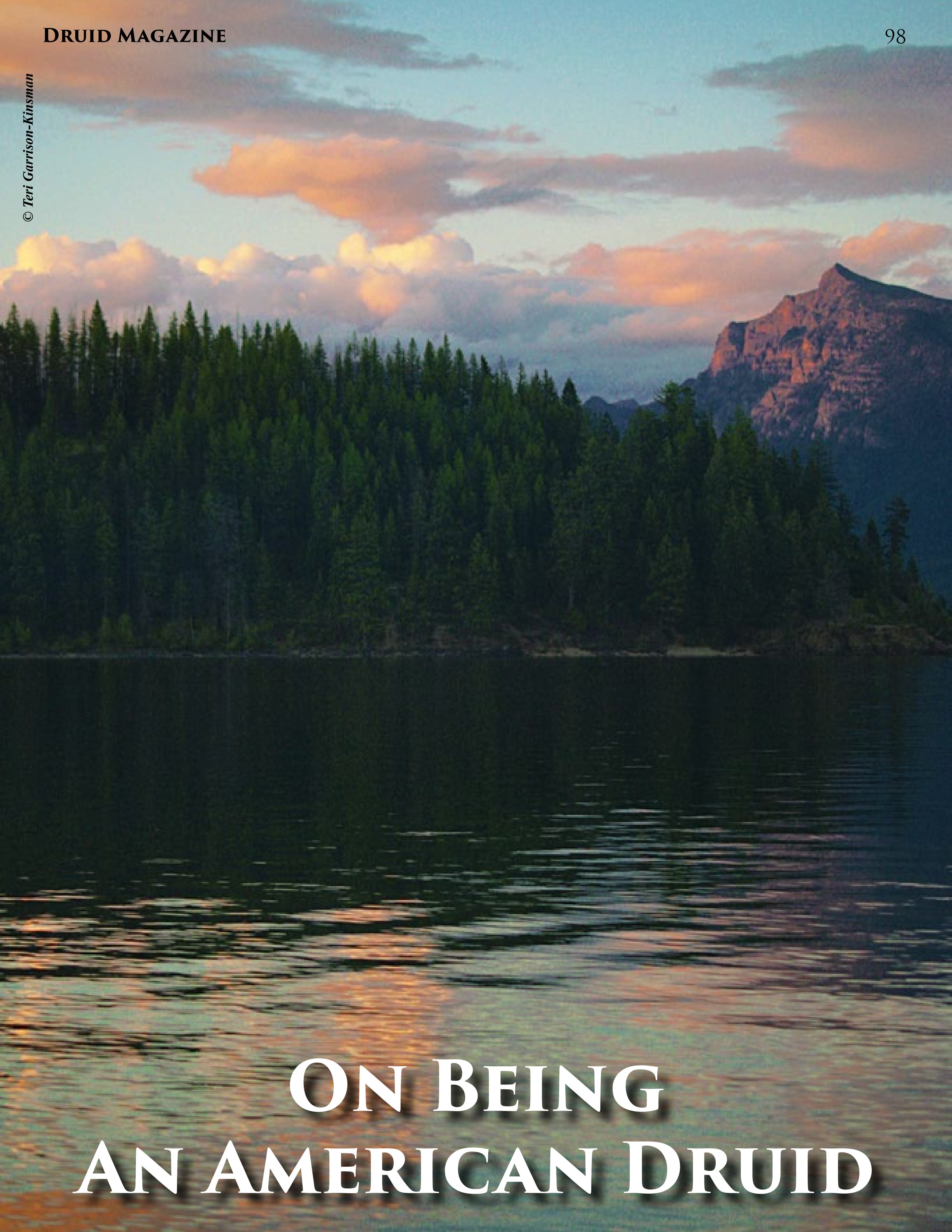
The fire burned hot that last night. Evangeline and I presented the Nettle Song to a generous audience, and it felt to me like both a gift from and to the gods. The Nettle Song won the Eisteddfod competition, and in winning, a great gauntlet had been laid down. Would I accept the challenge to keep writing? To keep creating? Would I get out of my own head and engage my community?

On the long drive home, I mentally picked up that gauntlet. The Eisteddfod bonfires offered an alternative to my pre-ECG pledge to burn everything I had ever attempted to write. I realized that I needed to burn away not my writing, but the resistance within me, the obsession with perfection and completion, the assumption that the creative process was a lonely one. Every day, I must artfully stack the wood in my creative heart. Every day I must seek out the spark of community to light the fire. I must let it burn, and enjoy the burning. I must build it all again the next day, and the next. I must remember that the excuses I make to the Mari Lwyd, barring her entry, are meant to be nothing more than playful banter—that what Creativity and I both *really* want is to sit together around a fire, sharing food and ale.

Loam is a massage therapist, writer, and composer of silly herbal ditties. She was first introduced to paganism in the late 90s as part of the San Francisco Bay Area Reclaiming Tradition. She discovered Druidry in 2011 and became a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids in April 2016.

© Brom Hanks

The KDK Grove in Michigan facilitated the opening ritual with a little help from friends.



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ON BEING AN AMERICAN DRUID

On Being An American Druid

By Ahote Baggins

"I salute the light within your eyes where the whole universe dwells. For when you are at that center within you and I am at that place within me, we shall be one."

(Crazy Horse, 1877)

© Ahote Baggins

© Ahote Baggins

From the moment we hit the light, we find ourselves bombarded with stimuli and awash in emotions; experiencing constant change and nagging uncertainty, we live our lives earnestly searching for contexts through which to contain ourselves and (paradoxically) set ourselves free. Being an American Druid provides me such a context …

Thoughts are like dreams

in that when you "awaken" within them

you suddenly realize where you actually are,

flickers of lucidity.

I am an American Druid,

basking in all the Elemental splendor of this Mother Land.

She is verdant, resplendent, nurturing and seductive,

and living along the wheel of Her year; I am transfused with Her energy,

enchanted and emboldened.

I cherish the communion between Her and I,

the strong connection She makes with me.

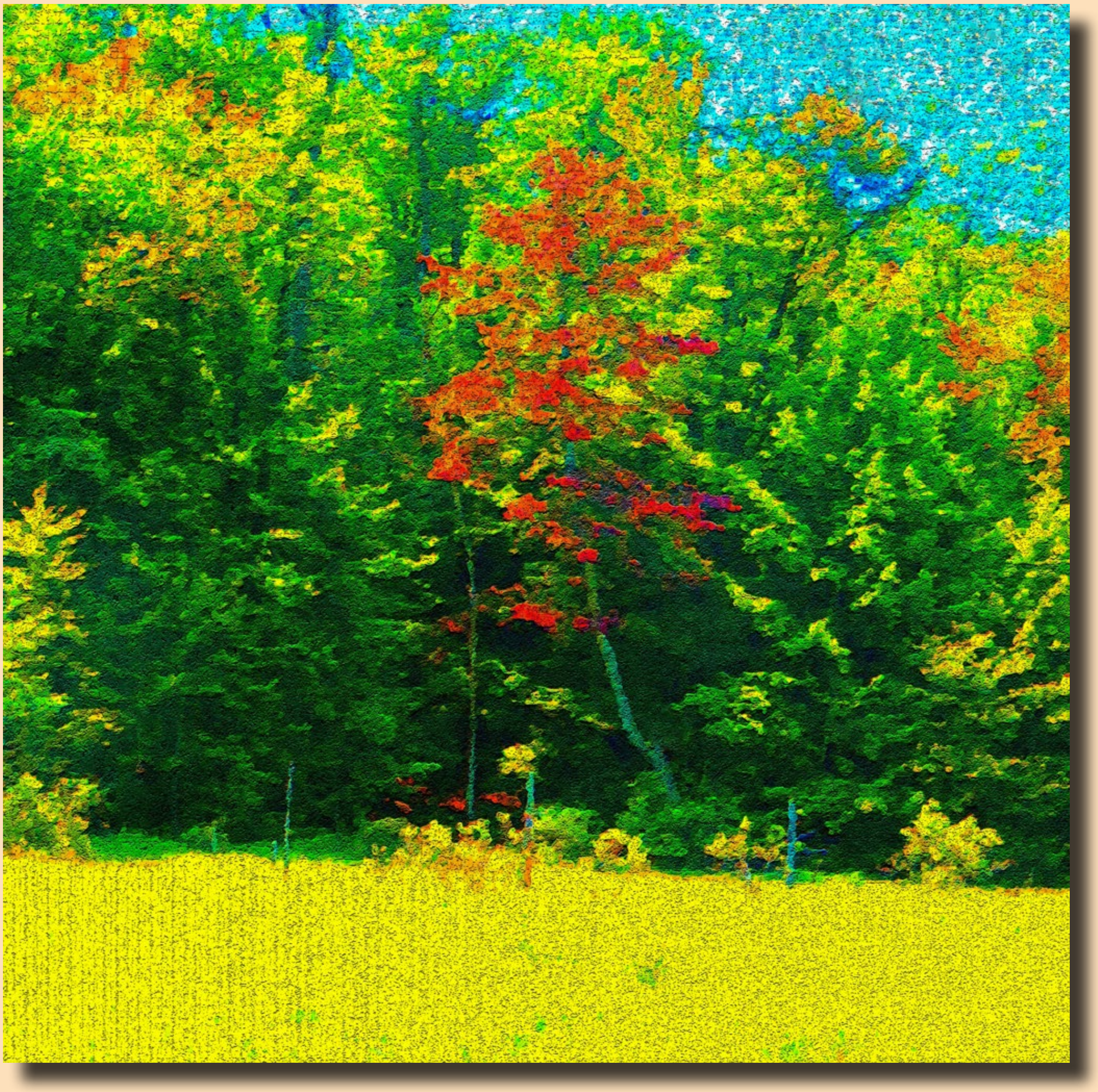
I surrender my heart and mind to Her.

Like a Native American flute, She plays me,

slow, deep, moaning,

ecstasy.

© Ahote Baggins



As an American Druid, my life with Her is more magical …

Along the woodline,

we walk, together, forever,

planting and nurturing and harvesting,

manifestations, never-ending,

contemplation.

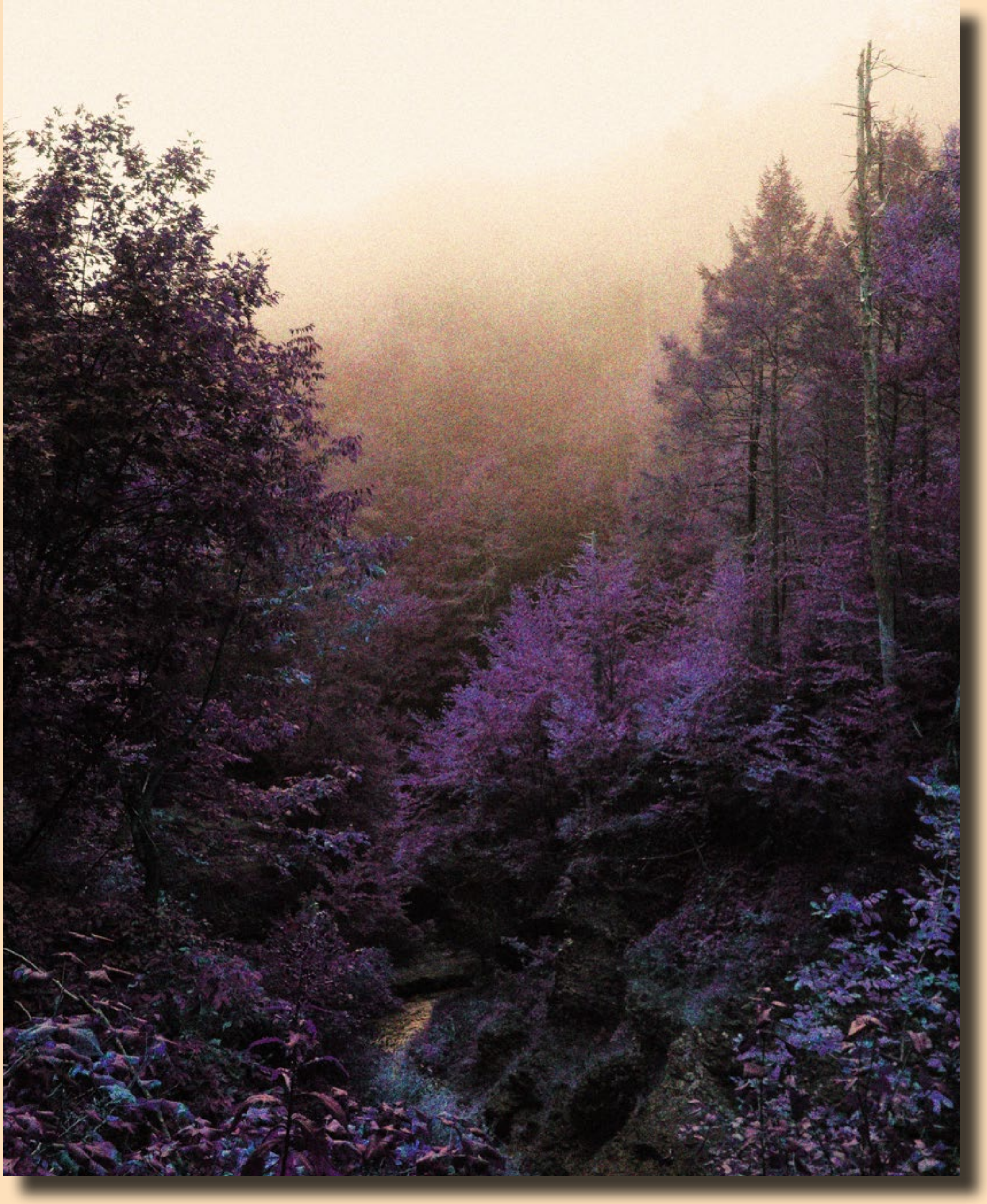
And my connection with Her is more meaningful …

I am at the bottom of the Great Mountain;

through the mist, I sense it looming over me,

ahead of me, and from its summit,

I hear her calling my name.



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© Ahote Baggins

I am an American Druid,
walker of the Path, seeker of Truth,
chalice of Nwyfre, stream of Awen,
one of the Tribe.

I am not Mother, I am of Mother;
Mother is the Source of all things.

As I learn to love Her,
She guides me to Myself,
then to You, then to Us,
then back to Her.

balance, harmony, and inner peace to all beings :-)

Ahote Baggins is an American Druid currently residing in Northeast Pennsylvania. An Ovate grade member of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids (OBOD), he is a romanticist, spiritualist, poet, photo artist, and lover of books, music, tarot, yoga, and candlelight. When not at home enjoying the company of his cat Ari, dog Jackie, and houseplants Chloe and Sophie, he can be found in the neighboring woods consorting with trees and other forest creatures (both mundane and otherworldly).

VOICES OF THE ANCESTORS

SACRED STORYTELLING FROM WEST AFRICA

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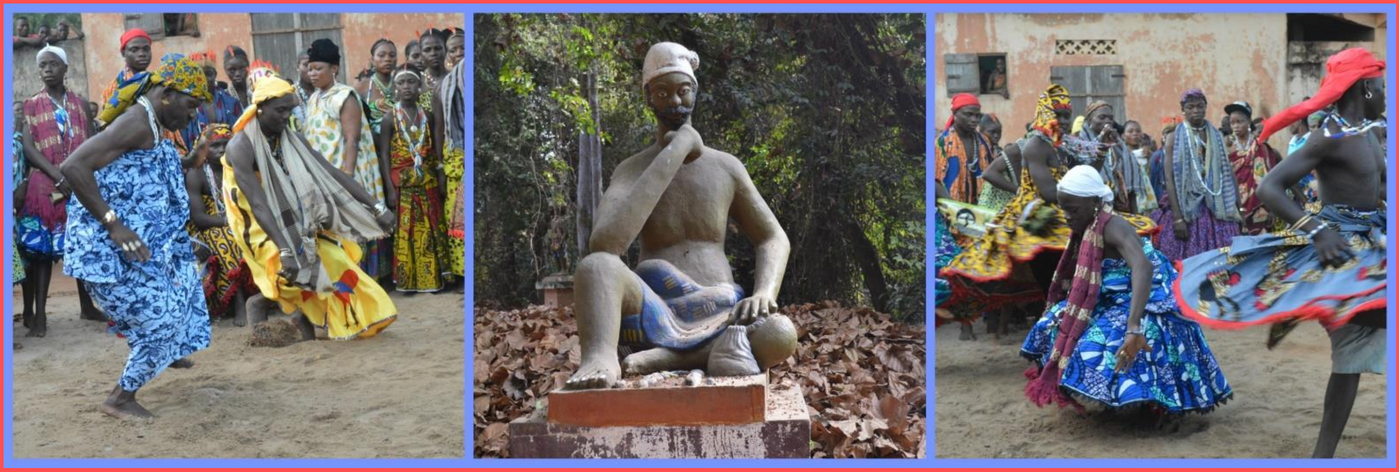

Half a world away in Ghana and Togo, West Africa, the sacred stories of the Ancestors are being lost. Stories of the Gods and Goddesses. Stories of the Land and Sea. Stories of the People and their History. The elders are forgetting – and soon these ancient stories will die.

HELP US PRESERVE THE ANCESTORS' ANCIENT VOICES

In November 2017, our team will traverse eastern Ghana and western Togo, home of West African Voodoo, meeting traditional storytellers, and recording their stories.

WE ARE:

Gail Nyoka, storyteller and award winning playwright, Druid – Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids and Priestess – Fellowship of Isis

Godfried Agbezudor, Voodoo priest and traditional elder of the Ewe tribe of Ghana

Sara Corry, Druid – Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids

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